THE MAYOR OF FILBERT

CHARLES FRANCIS STOCKING

STRAND PRICE
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CHAPTER 1

IN one of the most fertile sections of the Mississippi valley, not far from where the vast prairie, stretching interminably westward, breaks in its first gentle undulations against the monotonous lowlands of the Great Lakes region, rises the somewhat pretentious town of Filbert, county seat and the center of a prosperous agricultural community.

There is little about it to attract the tourist or casual traveler, beyond its charming setting on a narrow ridge between green vales dotted with tidy farms. Its soil is deep and black, and through it a muddy stream, dignified as a river and bearing a sonorous Indian name, has cut an erratic, meandering course. The climate is classified as salubrious, although the death rate is high. Yet this—who knows?—may find explanation in the activities of the many eager medical fledgelings who annually choose Filbert as an auspicious field in which to inaugurate their professional careers. Be that as it may, the stolid, resolute pioneers who long since halted their patient oxen there for the last camp, endured without murmur in the years to come the insufferable summer heat and the cruel cold of the long, bleak winters, while their rugged lives drew out, like lengthening shadows, far past the allotted Scriptural span.

These pioneers were largely Germans, heavy and phlegmatic, who had toiled westward to the limitless prairies in search of freedom and opportunity. Their settlement expanded, but tediously and through long periods of imperceptible growth. In time its Teutonic character became complicated by families of Irish immigrants. And early, very early, Filbert began to acquire that distinctive cast which remains

in part to this day, as out of the magma slowly crystallized a dollared aristocracy, emitting the pungent odor of alcohol and drawing about itself a society sleek with fat living and supercilious with the self-esteem that comes from an education beyond the intelligence to assimilate it. Dogged conservatism and stern distaste for innovation marked the assemblies of its early governing bodies. With the increase of material prosperity, the mental inertia of the pioneers gradually developed into cankered apathy, and the curse of a fixed mentality became the heritage of a large portion of the present generation. Add now to this a miserly instinct, born of the pinching pioneer days; a fanatic jealousy of "personal liberty," approaching dangerously near petrifaction of the moral sense; a selfish inhibition of civic pride, lest the purse be touched, and we have the basic elements of the municipal consciousness obtaining in Filbert when those certain events occurred with which this recital is to be concerned.

On a cold, raw evening, late in January, Filbert lay feebly resolving two insistent facts: one, the thick blanket of mist, the dripping remnant of a sharp midwinter thaw, which for hours had been slowly obliterating its outlines and quenching its lights; the other, the disquieting message received that afternoon from the State Capital, announcing the passage of the bill granting suffrage—with modifications—to women.

That same chill evening two widely different events occurred within the confines of Filbert whose cumulative effects were destined to completely alter her civic complexion. In a large frame dwelling in one of the better residential districts, where the fog lay so heavy that the few shivering pedestrians might have thought the house deserted, a dozen men sat about the table in the spacious dining room. At the head of the table stood the host, a man of middle age, of medium height, portly and somewhat bald. His right hand held a pair of nose glasses, with which he made frequent emphatic gestures to emphasize his low-voiced remarks.

"Gentlemen," he was saying, "Filbert lies prostrate tonight, throttled by fifty saloons, five breweries, and innumerable dives, among the latter several practically licensed disreputable resorts, regulated by the Health Officer. Our city

administration is fetid; our mayor is a brewer and saloon-keeper, and his 'ring' is in full command of municipal affairs. Thieves, gamblers, and cut-throats flock to our hospitable doors to batten on our corruption; while our respectable citizens are sacrificing their property and leaving the city, that they may rear their children amid more wholesome surroundings. Gentlemen, I ask you again: must this situation endure?"

An impressive silence followed these remarks, broken at length by a spare, angular man of professional bearing who sat at the far end of the table.

"Our hope, Mr. Taft, is in the women. They have now acquired the vote—"

"They have, Dr. Loring!" interrupted the host, eagerly. "They have! And because of it I have summoned you gentlemen to gather here to-night."

"Ah!" exclaimed one of the guests, "then the fight is on."

"Gentlemen," resumed the host, his eyes glistening as he spoke, "the township election will be held in April, at which time only a supervisor and a few minor officials are to be chosen. There is no political fight on the tapis. It has occurred to me that there could be no more propitious time for submitting the question of local option to the people, with the view of suppressing the saloons.

"I am not one of those," he went on hurriedly, "who believe that all our social woes are attributable to the saloon, and I have no desire to exaggerate facts and unjustly arraign that institution—"

"Quite impossible!" broke in Dr. Loring, with a gesture of impatience. "Why, gentlemen," addressing the others, "I have seen the saloons in every possible light, at all times, and in their every aspect! They are always the same—utterly foul, rotten, swinish! They are our most prolific breeding places for dirty politics; they ring with profane ribaldry, and reek with the filthiest sensualism! They are vermin-infested vampires, gorged with the best blood of the human race! Knowing their black character, shall we tolerate them longer? No! Filbert, I tell you, is going 'dry'!"

"With God's help, Doctor," murmured the clerical gentleman at his right, "with God's help!"

"And the women's, Mr. Tislin," amended Loring, quickly. "By heaven! you preachers will have to swap theory for practice if you are going into this campaign."

"Dr. Loring is quite right," put in Oliver Claver, president of the Claver Manufacturing Company, "for the saloon is entrenched in wealth and thoroughly organized."

"Wealth!" ejaculated Loring. "Why, gentlemen," he went on, with increasing vehemence, "do you realize that more than ten billions of dollars annually pass through the hands of the distillers and brewers of this country? And yet, for all this immense expenditure there is returned to us absolutely *nothing* that in any way contributes to our individual or civic welfare, nor is there a single contribution to our enlightenment, our education, or our national character! Quite the contrary: the saloon openly and brazenly thwarts our progress in every possible manner! It corrupts legislatures, debauches courts, and hinders the purposes of government! It undermines civic virtue and corrodes public sentiment! Filbert is only one of thousands of communities whose moral and social atmosphere has been polluted by its touch! The saloon creates and shelters thieves and murderers! It contributes appallingly to our annals of crime, pauperism, and insanity! It is absolutely autocratic and as absolutely merciless! It shamelessly flaunts its partnership with our government, and takes refuge behind its protection! It boasts openly that a Christian civilization not only tolerates it, but actually perpetuates it by licensing its crime and debauchery! The saloon is the recruiting station for every evil, the lounging place of the vicious and the morally weak! It is the great destroyer of character and habits of industry! It is the greatest curse to home life that the world has ever known! It is, I tell you, the satanic embodiment of heartless, sordid, criminal selfishness—evil's most potent tool for the paralyzing of every faculty of man's spiritual being! And do we sit here discussing the advisability of—"

"True, Doctor, quite true," again interrupted Taft. "But it is well that we should understand the nature of the contest that we are about to precipitate. We shall fight against money and men, true; but we shall also encounter a mighty

opponent in the heritage which our present generation has received from the past. We are fighting against the weakness of human nature. I need not tell you that Filbert will be rent from end to end; that business will be disrupted; that friendships of a lifetime will be swallowed up in deadliest hatred."

"Remember, Doctor," warned Judge Pendleton, "that back of the saloons lies our real enemy, an enemy that has reduced mighty empires to ashes."

"The Liquor Trust?" returned Loring. "No, my friend. Our real enemy is the Government; for back of the saloon and the Liquor Trust is the State license. But back of that is the voter. The voter who casts his ballot for license becomes thereby a partner in the liquor traffic, with the saloonkeeper as his authorized agent. The State is in partnership with the saloon—but we are the State!"

"Then the real issue, Doctor," suggested Claver, "is the arousing of the people, especially those who mean well, but who simply don't care."

"There are two classes of people who perpetuate the saloon in Filbert," said the doctor, turning to the speaker: "namely, its friends and patrons, and the apathetic who, because of fear of offending, or for business reasons, will not vote against it. Those most guilty of the continued existence of the saloon are the careless, apathetic voters who feel no serious concern for civic righteousness, and who manifest their indifference to their duty by remaining away from the polls. This sort of citizenship is the greatest hindrance to the abolition of the saloon—these citizens who have no real convictions, who do not stand for anything in particular, yet who, sitting in smug comfort beside their cozy hearths, could weep over the latest sentimental novel in utter indifference to the real human tragedies at that very moment being enacted in the dives and resorts which, by virtue of their votes, or lack of voting, are sucking the life-blood from our people!"

Some moments of animated discussion followed the doctor's earnest remarks. Then, after a long interval of silence, a clear tenor voice rose near the host. And its soft, tremulous tones bore to the refrain of "Bringing in the Sheaves"

the improvisation which was destined to become the "dry" slogan of the subsequent campaign:

"Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Sound the words in triumph, fling them to the sky!
Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Liquor's doom has sounded,
Filbert's g-o-i-n-g dry!"

One by one the guests stood and joined in the low singing, for they dared not raise their voices. Tears began to stream down the faces of some; others choked with emotion and turned away.

"Gentlemen," said Roger Taft, in a solemn voice, "never did our country have greater need of men with clear heads and steady nerves than to-day. And the first requisite is the suppression of the liquor traffic in our midst. Shall we launch the contest—"

"The campaign, Roger," interrupted Dr. Loring, "*is* launched—here—to-night. And, as our friends Lee and Peele have suggested, it is launched, not only with the view of suppressing the saloons, but of cleaning up Filbert thoroughly and driving Mayor Schmidt and his gang into political oblivion. Are we agreed?"

Taft bowed silently. Then the guests came forward to shake his hand and bid him good-night.

"Just a moment, Roger," said Loring, who had lingered after the others had departed. "You expect to draw up the petition to-morrow to file with the county judge, asking that the local option question be submitted to the voters in April?"

"Yes," Taft answered.

"We ought to get it signed up in a day or two. It must be filed sixty days before election. And now, how about Schmidt?"

"He is to meet us in my office to-night," said Taft, with a slight nervous tremor at the mention of the name. "He has a compromise to suggest—wants the liquor people to take charge of the temperance reform movement in Filbert."

"Humph!" grunted Loring in disgust. "Being a brewer, he'd like to fill us up with beer instead of whiskey, eh?"

Taft drew out his watch and glanced at it. "Come," he

said. "We will go down in your car. And—" his hand trembling as he replaced the watch, "something tells me that we shall need every ounce of our strength!"

* * * * * *

Out of the dense fog the belated west-bound limited emerged that evening, dank and dripping, and came to a grinding stop before the shabby brick depot. A tall, lean figure, with thin top coat and stained derby hat, and carrying a small valise, descended from the smoking car and, after a moment's hesitant peering into the gloom ahead, pulled his hat down over his eyes and started up the wet platform. A raucous voice accosted him from a sheltered corner of the depot.

" 'Bus this side to th' Bulwer House! Goin' right up!"

The man stopped. "How far?" he asked, abruptly.

"Just up th' street, sir," returned the hotel runner cheerily, as he reached for the valise.

The man fumbled in his pockets for a moment, then withdrew his hand and turned up the frayed collar of his coat. "No—I'll walk," he said, wheeling sharply on his heel.

Rounding the corner into Main Street, his teeth chattered and his slender body shook with the damp chill. Presently he passed a brilliantly lighted saloon; then several. And then their frequency stirred his sluggish thought, and he fell to wondering if the dispensing of liquor constituted the chief industry of the town. The light and din from a large saloon on an opposite corner urged their dubious invitation upon him. For a moment he stood, with his breath issuing like clouds of steam. Then he clasped his coat about him, crossed over, and made as if to enter.

But at the door he stopped, drew himself up with a quick, jerky movement, and turned again up the street. As he did so, a woman emerged through an adjoining door, over which blazed the announcement *Ladies' Entrance,* and blocked his way.

"Oh!" she cried, in a startled voice, raising her painted face to his. "Your Honor—"

The man reached out and seized her arm. She laughed coarsely and stood passive before him. "Better not!" she

warned, in a mocking tone. "Miss Greta might hear of it!" Then, with another unsteady laugh, she detached his grasp and slipped past him into the darkness.

The man shrugged his shoulders and continued his way. Something other than the woman's words seemed to have impressed him. "Wide open town!" he muttered. "And Sunday night—I'd like to be mayor of this burg for a while. He must mint coin from these dives. That girl's a 'dip'—"

Farther up the street the buildings loomed larger and more spectral. Over them hung the pall of mist, through which the lights from the few offices occupied that evening struggled like funeral tapers. A casual glance to his left—it is so often the merely casual that determines fate—brought the man to a stop. Upon a glass door, behind which swung an arc lamp, was a name familiar to him.

Old memories swarmed out of the past as he stood there, damp and shivering. Through them rose the yearning for companionship which always smote him in a strange environment. He deliberated a moment longer, then stepped back to the curb and strained his eyes upward. The name appeared legibly on the lighted windows above. He returned to the entrance and slowly mounted the stairs to the second floor. To his left the name again beckoned him, and toward it he made his way.

But, as he drew near the closed door, loud voices and hot words fell upon his ears. He hesitated, with his hand on the knob. A deep curse and a murderous threat issued from within. Acting upon an unshaped impulse, he threw wide the door and strode into the room.

As he entered, a human form hurtled past him and fell, striking heavily against an iron radiator and crashing to the floor, where it lay, huddled and still. The two other occupants of the room stood for a moment, with eyes bulging and faces blanched; then rushed to the prostrate form and bent over it. One of them, after futile efforts to rouse the man, tore open the vest and collar, placed his ear against the motionless chest, felt frenziedly for the pulse, and then sank back and remained staring blankly into the fallen man's slowly glazing eyes.

"Good God, Loring!" cried his companion in a hoarse whisper. "Is he—"

"Dead!" gasped the other, without raising his head.

Then both turned and stared dully at the newcomer.

CHAPTER 2

WITH their dilated eyes fixed upon the motionless stranger, the two men slowly got to their feet.

"For God's sake shut that door!" burst from the one addressed as Loring, a sudden appreciation of their situation apparently sweeping over him.

The stranger reached out and closed the exit behind him. Loring's companion, his white face flecked with perspiration, hurled himself upon the door, locked it, and dropped the key into his pocket.

"Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely, planting himself in front of the man. "How came you here?"

"I was looking for Mr. Roger Taft," came the low-voiced reply.

With a quick movement Loring stooped and took up a pistol which lay near the open hand of the body. The unwelcome visitor smiled.

"Don't," he said, evenly. "It would make an anti-climax. I was an actor—once. My name is Smith—Charles Smith. I used to play with Roger Taft when we were youngsters back in Ohio. I guess you're the one, all right," he added, pushing up his hat and looking down into the terror-stricken face of the man before him.

But the latter fell suddenly back and sank trembling into a chair, where he sat staring wildly at the speaker. Loring, his straining sight fixed upon the now unshaded face of the newcomer, gave muffled vent to an exclamation. The look of horror which had mantled his features yielded to one of dull confusion, and his eyes began to rove alternately from the man to the body on the floor.

The stranger mechanically followed the doctor's gaze. Then something about the crumpled form seemed to draw

him. He moved slowly to it, bent over, and looked into the upturned face. An inarticulate sound broke from his lips. He recoiled a step, straightened up, turned to the others, and stood staring blankly. He had looked into Nature's mirror and seen—himself!

Loring's cold voice shattered the tension. It seemed to come from an infinite distance. "You—know—him?" indicating the body with a slight motion of his head.

"No!" returned Smith, in an awed whisper. "I never saw him before!"

"What had he to do with your coming here to-night?"

"Nothing—before God! I came here seeking a position as traveling salesman. Here"—fumbling in a pocket—"is my card. My firm in Cleveland let me out. I heard that Gaylor and Company, of Filbert, wanted a man. I took the first train. When I saw your name on the door," nodding to Taft, "I remembered that you were practicing law in some western town, and—"

"Do you know any one else in Filbert?" interrupted Loring, in the same ominous tone.

"No. This is my first visit to your town."

For the space of a minute there was silence in the room. Then Taft drew out his handkerchief and mopped his dripping brow. "Your mother—?" he began feebly, his bulging eyes still glued to the man's face as if he were an apparition.

"Lena Smith." The reply was prompted by quick intuition. "We lived in Folsom, Ohio. Your house was in the same block. You and I were playmates—but that was twenty-five years ago."

Loring turned to Taft for confirmation of the man's words. The latter struggled to his feet and extended a shaking hand, as if groping in shadowy archives.

"Charlie Smith had a scar—on his arm—where I cut him with a knife—"

Smith quickly pulled up the coat and shirt sleeves over his right arm and exhibited a long, jagged scar. A sob burst from Taft, and he stumbled forward and grasped Smith's hand convulsively. Loring slipped the pistol into his pocket and drew a quick breath of relief. A scant five minutes had passed since Smith entered the room, yet it seemed an age.

Slowly, as their wits returned, dawned a perception of their peril. The doctor again bent hurriedly over the body. Taft leaned against the door, listening breathlessly. After some moments of tense silence, Loring rose.

"We—we are—in for it!" he said, in a suppressed voice. Then, controlling himself with a great effort, and tightening his lips: "And we will stick—or hang—together!" eying Smith significantly.

"But—who is he?" asked the latter, in bewilderment.

"He is," replied Loring, slowly, "or was, the mayor of Filbert."

At this unanticipated reply Smith's mouth jerked open with an exclamation of amazement.

"Listen!" Taft's piercing whisper blanched their faces anew.

A step was heard in the corridor. The lawyer's legs bent under him. Loring's hand flew to the pocket where lay the pistol. Smith stepped quickly to the wall and switched off the lights. A hand was laid on the knob without, and the door shaken. A moment of fearful silence, and then footsteps were again heard, dying away down the corridor.

"It's Mulligan!" gasped Taft, sinking to the floor in a sudden access of terror.

"We must get him out of here!" muttered Loring. "Over to my office—!"

A few minutes afterward, the strangely assembled group, panting and dripping, stood in the darkness about the body of the former mayor in Dr. Loring's office, just across the hall. The town clock in the court house belfry was then booming the hour of twelve. The tension was like that of the interval between the flash of lightning and the splitting crash which follows.

"If you don't mind," announced Smith through the curtain of heavy gloom, "I'll smoke a cigarette."

* * * * * *

Again the spectral clock bellowed forth the passing hour to the dead night. In the little inner room, which served Dr. Loring as a laboratory, a single gas jet, turned low, threw a flickering, yellow light upon the disordered scene and cast

great, ghoulish shadows against the walls and the door of the reception room beyond, where lay the dead man.

"You are mad to suggest it!" Smith's words came jerkily, as he essayed to rise.

"Listen!" pursued the doctor, drawing his chair closer and speaking excitedly. "His death was the merest accident, as I have told you! He was a man of violent, uncontrollable temper! Our discussion grew heated; he lost himself; and just as you entered he drew the pistol which he always carried and rushed at me with a threat of murder! In some manner he stumbled over a chair and fell, his head striking against the radiator! Death was instantaneous—"

"Then why try to cover it up?"

"Because of the peculiar political situation now existing in Filbert, and, more especially, because of one man, Royal Denman, the implacable enemy of Mr. Taft and myself!"

"Well?"

"Were we to tell the truth about this affair, he would send you to the gallows—"

"Send me—!"

"Assuredly, to meet the demands of justice. And then he would hold Mr. Taft and me in his power as his most valued political assets. I am the county coroner; Mr. Taft is leader of the anti-saloon forces here; Denman is counsel for the liquor interests—"

"But why not place the body at the foot of the stairs below? They'd say he met his death by falling—"

"It would avail us nothing," Loring interrupted truculently, "for some of the mayor's friends certainly knew that he was to meet us here to-night! If we succeeded in getting the body to his rooms, suspicion would be just as strongly directed against us, for it would be said that, in view of the approaching local option campaign, we had attempted to weaken our opponents by foully removing their leader! No, the only salvation—yours as well as ours—lies in the desperate course which I have just outlined!"

"But," protested Smith, hotly, "I never saw the man before! I know nothing about him or your town! The fraud would be detected over night—"

"It *is* a wild venture, I know," said the doctor, speaking hurriedly and disconnectedly, while his glance hovered furtively about the door of the outer room. "But your resemblance to Schmidt is so strong, so startling—it may be the hand of Providence! And—but there is no time for further parley! We are in a desperate situation! There *must* be a mayor for a few days longer, and you, Mr. Smith, must assume the rôle!"

"Which again I respectfully decline to do," replied Smith, coldly, rising and turning to the door. "You gentlemen may take your chances, relying with entire confidence upon my silence—"

"A moment, my friend!" Loring's sanguinary voice cut through the gloom like an icy blast. Smith veered about and looked into the muzzle of the dead mayor's pistol. "If I am to be accused of murder, Mr. Smith, the accusation shall be just! I think we understand each other, do we not? It is quite imperative that you remain with us!"

Smith and the doctor stood facing each other like animals at bay. Taft, who had taken small part in the conversation, lay doubled up in his chair, the embodiment of dole. He was entrusting his future unreservedly to the indomitable will which he now saw forcing an utter stranger into the most desperate of plights.

Then Smith laughed, a soft, sarcastic laugh, and shrugged his shoulders. The doctor lowered his weapon. Over his own set features a smile broke, grim and ominous, but the semi-darkness hid it. Outside, the funereal mists thickened into watery vapor, and soaked slowly into the drenched earth; within, the tense figures which Fate was shifting so strangely on her board seemed waxen images in the sallow light.

Minutes passed. What happened to the stranger under the impulsion of fear, surprise, and coercion may be only conjectured. Then the trio emerged from the office and glided noiselessly through the deserted corridor and into the stairway, where hung the glowing arc lamp. Between Taft and Smith, held upright, with an arm dangling limply about the neck of each, and clad in the latter's shabby clothes, hung the body of the former mayor. Close in the rear, and moving

with furtive watchfulness, followed the doctor. A moment later the ghostly procession gained the street.

As they strained desperately through the doorway below, a drunken man lurched against them, and stopped to protest. But, glancing into Smith's face, he doffed his battered hat and began an incoherent apology.

"He's a dommed sight worse off nor me, eh, Y'r Honor?" he chuckled, pointing an unsteady finger at the body and weaving to and fro. "F'r I've got me legs still."

Taft involuntarily thrust out an arm and shoved the man roughly aside. Loring, softly uttering an oath, crushed the hat down over the head of the dead man and pushed his companions on to the curb and into his waiting car. Smith—though he knew not why—turned to the befuddled wretch stumbling after them. "Go home to your wife and babies!" he called, just as the doctor, who had sprung into the front seat, shot the car and its strange occupants out into the slippery road.

"You fool!" muttered Loring, half turning toward Smith. "Jordan has no wife or babies!"

On through the black night sped the roaring car. At the junction of Main and Fourth Streets a policeman rushed out into the oasis of light shed by the corner lamp and commanded them to stop. He caught himself barely in time to escape the wheels. The drizzling rain had turned into a steady downpour, and the windows of the flying car ran with water. Taft had shrunk away from the corpse in horror, and lay squeezed into a corner in a semi-stupor. For some minutes—it seemed hours—the conveyance careened around corners, balanced on two wheels, skidded into curbs, and grazed poles, while Smith, bewildered by the precipitation with which events had been crowded into the brief interval since his arrival in the town, strove to orient his tangled thought and devise means of extricating himself from the trap into which he had so innocently walked. At length, when the big machine seemed to be pacing the wind over a smooth pavement, he put out an arm through the darkness, quietly opened the door, and prepared to step out—just as the car skidded to a jerky stop and Doctor Loring flashed a pocket lamp into the ghastly features of the dead mayor.

Smith instantly checked his rising anger and recovered his aplomb. Again he laughed quietly. The thing was not without its ridiculous elements. He was acquiescing only because it had come upon him with such an extraordinary lack of preparation. And as yet he was quite confident of his ability to escape. Without speaking, he helped draw the body from the car and bear it through the pouring rain up to the door of the low, stone building before which they had stopped. Only when the iron door creaked open on its rusted hinges, and the entrance yawned impenetrably black before him, did it dawn upon his groping thought that he was in a cemetery! The shock left him numb.

Moving in mechanical obedience to Loring's sepulchral whispers as they echoed through the dank vault, Smith, cold and dripping, helped thrust the body into the place of sepulture indicated by the doctor and lift the heavy marble seal into place. Then, still moving as if in hideous nightmare, he let himself be urged again out through the rain and into the car.

A quarter of an hour later they had drawn up before a stairway on Main Street, and the dazed Smith had been pushed up the steps and into the cheerless suite of rooms above, where the doctor, after lighting the grimy oil lamp, threw himself, soaked and panting, into a chair.

CHAPTER 3

FILBERT slept late the next morning, beneath its mantle of drab clouds, and the day was far spent when the Honorable Thomas Mulligan, city clerk by grace of machine politics, received the brief telephone message that Mayor Schmidt had met with an accident, and would not be down. And Tom, in whom cerebration was ever a process of travail, had spent another full hour on his labored council report before he awoke to the fact that the message had come from Dr. Loring. Then he laid down his pen and ran his inky fingers meditatively through his shock of red hair. The thing certainly had a strange aspect! And

the longer he pondered, the stranger it appeared and the more befuddled became his thought, until at length the imminence of brain-fag rendered it imperative that he consult the oracle of local Democracy, the Honorable Royal Denman.

But Tom's was not the only perplexed brain in Filbert that dreary morning. Mrs. Roger Taft had paused often and long in the performance of her matutinal duties to meditate, not on the important fact that she had acquired the franchise, but on the hour—three a. m.!—of her husband's return home, and the equally startling circumstance of his remaining in bed until eleven and past, alternately snoring and groaning, now sunk in a depth of sleep that resembled death, now tossing violently and muttering incoherent references to the mayor and Dr. Loring and other names with which she was unfamiliar. For Roger had always been a model of propriety, a man of clear conscience and sound physique, and certainly something most unusual must have occurred after his "stag" dinner of the preceding evening to so disturb his wonted peace of mind.

Then, too, the luxurious private office of Royal Denman was a scene of much dubious conjecture that bleak morning. And when Tom Mulligan was announced he was conducted, in accord with previous instructions, directly into the presence of his chief, whom he found in earnest conversation with Dr. Voss, friend and physician of the mayor.

"Well, Tom?" Denman's congenital drawl rose to a little squeak. "What's doing?" He waved the obeisant servant of the machine to a seat and turned a perspicuous eye upon him.

"That's just what I come to find out, Mr. Denman," replied the clerk, folding his ungainly form into an upholstered chair and ejecting a long stream of tobacco juice at an adjacent cuspidor. "He's laid up."

"Who told you?"

"Doc Loring 'phoned me this mornin'."

Denman threw a significant glance at Dr. Voss, then continued:

"But I told you to keep track of him last night."

"Sure! An' I loafed round th' council rooms till after

'leven, waitin' f'r 'im; an' thin I ricollictid how he said he was to see Mr. Taft, an' so I went to his office—but th' door was locked—"

"Yes, yes," Denman interjected impatiently; "and then?"

"I dunno—but I could a swore there was a light in th' office just afore I tried th' door—"

"Ah! And so you hung around until they came out, eh? Who was there?" Denman leaned forward and eagerly awaited the reply.

The dull-witted clerk shifted uneasily in his chair under a latent sense of remissness. "No, sir, I didn't," he confessed. "Fact is, I never thought of it. 'Twas late—an' th' wife was waitin'—"

A snort of disgust burst from Denman. "You poor fool, Tom!" he cried, settling back with a gesture of irritation. "If you'd had an ounce of brains instead of a bucket of sawdust in your noddle, you could have made your fortune! Bah!"

Mulligan's eyes bulged slowly as Denman's words, suggestive of a deep mystery abroad, filtered through his thick head. But before he could scan his limited vocabulary for a reply, the lawyer concluded:

"Run around in the sun, Tom, and see if you can thaw out from the ears up! Then find out where the mayor was last night, and report to me."

"But—His Honor—what's happened to 'im?" queried the bewildered clerk, shuffling to his broad feet.

"He fell," Denman offered guardedly. "Fell down the stairs to his rooms. Doctors Voss and Loring are attending him. Go 'long now, Tom," waving him toward the exit. "Call me up if you learn anything."

When the door closed behind Mulligan, the lawyer shrugged his shoulders in contempt, then turned to Voss.

"You say it was Loring who called you to the mayor's bedside?"

Dr. Voss, a short, thick-set, bewhiskered gentleman of Teutonic descent, replied quickly and with jerky emphasis.

"Loring, yes. About six this morning. The mayor was in bed, his head bandaged. Said he tripped going up stairs last night—or this morning—"

"And who was with him when it occurred?" pursued Denman, in a voice betraying excitement.

"Alone—he said. Lay at the foot of the stairs a long time; then climbed to his rooms and got to the telephone. Said he couldn't remember what doctor he called—just happened to get Loring. Must have been drunk, no?"

"H'm! Something can be made of that," mused Denman, absently. Then he penciled a memorandum to inquire of the telephone operator what calls Dr. Loring had received that night. "And what does Loring say?" he asked, looking up.

"Corroborated the mayor. Pronounced him badly bruised. Suspected cranial fracture, as Schmidt was out of his head most of the time."

"And did he seem to you to be wandering?" Denman eyed the doctor doubtfully.

"He certainly was flighty!" returned Voss. "Whispered—couldn't talk aloud. Said he wanted Loring to stay with him—" He stopped abruptly and seemed to reflect for some moments. Then, excitedly: *"Mein Gott!* that shows he was clean daffy, for he and Loring never used to speak—"

"Tell me," interrupted Denman, an odd look coming into his meager features, "did you see the mayor's face?"

"Yes; but it was painted with iodine, and almost covered with bandages. Say, he must have got an awful fall!"

"And you removed the bandages to examine—"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Voss, beginning to bristle. "That would have been highly unprofessional. You misinformed Mulligan, for I am not on the case with Dr. Loring. We members of the Filbert Academy of Medicine do not collaborate with the County Medical Association!"

"Well," insisted the lawyer, doggedly, "you should have stayed with him, anyway." Then, his impatience getting the better of his judgment: "Look here, Voss, there's something wrong about this! You—" He checked his words and sat back to regain his composure.

But Voss had risen and was consulting his watch. "I've got a call to make," he said, with an air of professional importance. "I'll come in later in the day and talk the matter over with you."

When left alone, Denman dropped his sharp chin on his hands and remained some time deep in thought. Then he roused from his reflections and summoned his stenographer.

"Call the mayor's rooms," he directed.

The girl returned and reported that Dr. Loring had issued strict orders that his patient should not be disturbed.

Then Denman bade her call Taft's office. This she did, and announced that Mr. Taft had not come down, and probably would remain at home all day. Whereupon Denman dismissed the girl and resumed his musing.

"Taft gave a 'stag' dinner last night—Sunday—and he's a church member. Something can be made of that. The petticoats have got the vote—ah! that's why. There's no doubt that Schmidt was in Taft's office when Mulligan called—and now he's done up and in Loring's hands. The township election is two months off. I suppose the opposition thinks it has scored. Humph!"

He laughed dryly, and shrugged his lean shoulders. Then his sallow brows knit again. "Just the sort of deal I should expect them to put over before launching their campaign. Crude—good Lord, how crude!"

Again he laughed. And then his chalky face grew dark, and a sinister look came into his steely gray eyes.

"But—I wonder—I wonder—"

* * * * * *

Had the mayor of Filbert been a man of high character, the city doubtless would have been more deeply stirred by the report of his accident and subsequent serious illness. As it was, however, there were few in whom the news gave rise to even the slightest concern, aside from his political affiliates and attachés; and among these there were no expressions of sympathy, but only selfish anxiety lest his illness terminate fatally and endanger the grasp which they maintained through him on the civic life of the community. And when on Wednesday it was announced that the mayor had so far recovered that he might drive out that afternoon, most of Filbert received the intelligence with a listless acquiescence in the fact.

Not so, however, Mr. Roger Taft, chairman of the Civic

League and exponent of reform by coercion. Consternation was plainly manifest in his office that day, and often his stenographer cast inquiring glances at the fidgeting, perspiring man, whose mind would not be held to the work in hand, and whose dictation was a jumble of ludicrous phrases and bad English.

Not so, likewise, the Loring household, where anxious speculation had been rife these two days. How came it that the doctor, who never had been known to speak of the mayor but in terms of derogation and censure, was now in constant attendance at his bedside?

And not so, lastly, Mr. Charles Smith himself, with head and face heavily bandaged and odorous of iodine, sitting on the edge of the mayor's bed in the darkened room and drawing what solace he might from a cigarette.

"Now that must be the last one for a while," said Dr. Loring, sternly. "Schmidt didn't smoke, and so you will have to cut out tobacco while you're here."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" retorted Smith, peevishly. "I'll be hanged if I don't blow this whole silly business the minute I get out!"

"Then," muttered Loring, savagely, "you will stay where you are!"

"You—you mean to say—!" Smith got to his feet and started toward the doctor. The latter broke into a nervous laugh as he contemplated the ridiculous figure cut by the erstwhile commercial traveler; but his risibility endured only for the moment in which the ludicrous appearance of the man drove from his own harassed brain the omnipresent thought of their mutual peril.

"Be reasonable, Smith," he urged, his face resuming the anxious, hunted look which it had worn. "It will be over shortly, if you do as you agreed and help carry this thing through. Then you can go."

"But," protested Smith, "you've kept me prisoner here since Sunday night! When you weren't with me you had some burly Irishman or Dutchman standing guard in the front room! And now, when I thought I had given my act and could go off the stage, you suddenly announce that I'm to go out this afternoon as mayor of Filbert—meet his friends, and—"

"Listen, man!" the doctor put in, rising and gently persuading the irritated Smith back to the bed. "It is all for the best. You must remain in Filbert for a few days, but not cooped up here. You've *got* to show yourself to the people! I've been censured and condemned, and have listened to rumors and wild speculation, until my nerves are giving way under the strain! Taft is a wreck—"

"But supposing I should get cornered?"

"The people will let you alone while you are thought to be convalescent. Mayor Schmidt had few friends and no confidants."

"You say he spoke German—"

"Yes, but—"

"Well," Smith exploded, "I don't know an umlaut from a cheese factory!"

"You will not be called upon to speak German the few days you are to be here," explained the doctor, striving to govern his own fears.

For some moments Smith sat nervously fingering his cigarette, his lips trembling and his brows drawn down in a conflict of emotions. Then he raised his head to voice a further protest. "What about his business affairs?" he said.

"You don't have to know anything about them," replied Loring. "When you drop out of sight his estate will go to Greta Schwartz. I think he has named her in his will."

"Who's she?" Smith demanded, with a show of new interest. "You haven't mentioned her."

"There was no need of it," the doctor returned, slowly and with additional uneasiness. "She—she's the daughter of a wealthy old pioneer of Filbert. They say," he went on, absently, "that—well, that Schmidt was going to marry her."

"What?" shouted Smith, dropping his cigarette.

Loring raised his head. His face looked tired and worn. "I know nothing about it," he said, wearily. "And it doesn't concern either of us. Schmidt had no relatives, and so he would naturally name his fiancée in his will—and perhaps it was only because he had business relations with her father. But you don't even have to see her."

The doctor's words seemed to have started a new train

of thought in Smith's mind, and for some moments he sat pondering. Meantime, the telephone rang, and Loring answered it.

"Denman," he announced, returning to the bedroom. "His daily inquiry about your condition. Said he was surprised and gratified to learn that you would ride out this afternoon."

The doctor uttered a tremulous sigh, and went on: "He suspects nothing, I am sure. Fortunately, he hasn't been here to see you. He and Schmidt were not on intimate terms. I let Mulligan and McCarty keep watch here because they are both utterly stupid and unsuspecting, and I simply *had* to forestall suspicion. Shelby, city attorney, wanted to come up, but I staved him off. Voss let his professional pride keep him away—thank heaven!"

Smith eyed the doctor keenly, and not without a degree of admiration, despite his own perturbation of soul. His manner relaxed a little, and his voice was less hostile as he commented on the success which had thus far attended Loring's plans.

"Now," the doctor continued, in disregard of the remark, "I will send for Mrs. Kahley to come while we are out and tidy up these rooms. She has taken care of Schmidt's apartment for years—did his washing, mending, and so on."

"What about his meals?" asked Smith, with genuine interest.

"He ate at the Bulwer House. You will do the same."

The men sat in oppressive silence for some time; then Smith stretched himself out again upon the bed and lapsed into thought, his gaze resting languidly on the vase of gorgeous roses adorning the stand opposite. Loring had not told him that Miss Greta's card had been attached to them, nor that she herself had been several times in the outer room during these terror-filled days of his supposed illness.

Presently Smith roused up and turned his eyes upon his silent companion. "Say," he inquired, listlessly, "when did Schmidt come to Filbert, anyway?"

Loring looked up with a nervous start. "He came here," he said, "with a gang of bridge laborers, when a boy. Then

he adopted Filbert as a permanent place of residence, and secured employment in old Pierre Vaughn's brewery. Twenty years later, at the time of his—his death, he was proprietor of that brewery, mayor of the city, and a man of affairs."

"H'm!" mused Smith. "Some business man, eh?"

"His material success," Loring explained, "was due almost entirely to his business associates, and in spite of a character which would have doomed to failure a man less politically shrewd. He was a person of coarse habits—excepting that he did not use tobacco—and was repellant, inhospitable, and solitary. He always lived alone—hadn't a relative, excepting, perhaps—I don't know." He broke off abruptly and remained silent.

"Well?" pursued Smith, turning his head inquiringly. "Excepting—?"

"Nobody," the doctor finished, sharply. His thought was on the dark-haired little woman who lived alone with the rosy-cheeked boy in the decrepit shack on the Holsman lot, but he did not voice it. Instead, he resumed the discussion of his plans, pursuing it with uncertain hastiness, as if laboring under the impulsion of a great fear.

"There will be some explaining to do—of course. But your having retained me in view of the fact that Schmidt and I were enemies may be attributed to your mistake in calling me while semi-delirious the night of your supposed accident. I shall probably have to explain why I took care of you myself, instead of calling a nurse—and why I allowed only Mulligan, McCarty and Voss to see you—

"But," his voice rising sharply, and a look of grim determination coming into his face, "we are going to put this thing over! I wouldn't have believed it possible before I was driven to the test; but these two days have demonstrated it! Now that your hair is shingled, you resemble Schmidt more than ever. It's astonishing! You are thinner than he, but we can lay that to your illness. Now my plan is for you to show yourself now and then for, say, a week—just long enough to remove suspicion from Taft and me. Then you can clear out. You can say that your physical condition

is such that you must take a long rest—a trip abroad, perhaps, to visit your old home. And there you can quietly die, as far as Filbert is concerned, closing the distressing incident and leaving us with our necks whole."

"By the way," drawled Smith, turning over on the bed and fixing his inquisitive gaze upon the doctor, "is the mayor's body still in that vault?"

Loring started up, deathly pale. For a moment he grasped the arms of his chair convulsively and sat rigid. Then, struggling to regain his composure, he replied in a voice scarcely above a whisper: "Never refer to that again—for God's sake! We are relying on your boyhood friendship for Roger Taft—on your present sense of justice—on your agreement to our terms!"

Smith laughed curtly, as if in enjoyment of the man's torture. Loring drew a wallet from his pocket with shaking hand.

"The first installment of what I agreed to give you," he said. "The next thousand will be handed you two days later, and the third the day you leave Filbert." He held out the handful of bills and watched Smith's face anxiously.

The latter regarded them for a moment. Then he listlessly reached out and took them. "I'll stick," he said, in a low tone. "What's the odds, anyway, win or lose! Call your car."

CHAPTER 4

LORING and Smith, the latter in overcoat and heavily muffled, sat in the outer room of the mayor's suite, awaiting the doctor's car.

"McCarty will go with us," the latter announced, nervously. "Don't say much to him—and speak in a hoarse whisper. Remember, he controls the third ward, the 'bloody third.' He and John Moller are the most powerful of the Democratic ward heelers. Moller was up here a couple of times while you were in bed, but I kept him out in this room. We'll stop at his livery stable and have a word with him."

Loring rose from his chair and began to pace back and forth. "You know," he resumed, as if craving the relief of speech, "the report that you insist on keeping me so close to you is going to soften those fellows considerably toward me." He laughed, but the laugh was shaky and unmirthful.

"Oh, by the way," he interjected, "don't forget that you are a German Catholic—that's of the utmost importance. We may meet Father Achtung. He called here Monday, but I only let him glance in at you."

"Humph!" grunted Smith from behind his bandages, the primitive vocable conveying the sum total of his emotions.

The doctor seized a chair and drew it up to Smith. "I have done some rapid thinking these two days," he said, with a nervous excitement that he could not keep in check, "and my hair is whiter in consequence of the strain. Your uncanny resemblance to Schmidt," he went on, seating himself and punctuating his remarks by frequently tapping Smith's knee, "presents you to us as a Providential means of escape from certain disaster; but more—considerations of personal safety aside—it offers a means of disconcerting the liquor interests by the removal of their leader. You are believed to be the mayor, and to have suffered mentally from a serious accident. This is exactly as we would have it, for a sick leader, subject to fits of mental aberration, is *no* leader for the 'wets.' I do not think they will offer serious objection to your leaving town in a week or so."

Smith voiced a murmur of reluctant interest.

"Last Monday," the doctor continued, as if in soliloquy, "the 'wets' got together and selected Mayor Schmidt as the Democratic nominee to the legislature, to act as the tool of the liquor interests for the defeat of the woman's suffrage bill, in case it passed and became a law—"

Smith started under the stimulus of a new shock. "So I am a candidate for the legislature too, am I?" he blurted. "What next? Missionary to the Zulus?"

Loring made a deprecatory gesture, but the other interrupted it. His endurance was being severely taxed. "Looks to me," he retorted angrily, "as if I were toying with sudden death! I'm a brewer, a saloonkeeper, mayor of Filbert, can-

didate for the legislature, engaged to a Dutch Gretchen I never laid eyes on—damn it!" he burst out in a loud, heady voice, "I balk! I'm going to quit—!"

At that moment came a gentle tapping at the door. Loring's face blanched to the eyes, and he rose excitedly, with a long, sibilant "Sh-h-h!" on his fluttering lips. Then the door was pushed softly open, and Alderman William McCarty entered deferentially, a huge, bulky Irishman, with beetling brows, scarlet face, and hands the size of boxing gloves. A silk hat was tilted on the back of his bald pate, and a thick, black cigar projected from a corner of his mouth at an angle but slightly off the perpendicular.

Loring quickly regained his composure and greeted the newcomer with forced cordiality. "Well," he said, with an awkward laugh, "I kept my promise to pull him through, didn't I?"

McCarty glanced curiously at Smith, then turned to the doctor. "Ye did that!" he cried, heartily. "An' it's us that's grateful to ye f'r it, too. An', Y'r Honor," addressing Smith, "th' doc has a heart, after all, whin he might 'av stuck ye full av pison while ye lay here, an' none av us ud bin th' wiser, f'r he's th' coronor. Ye want sich inimies, now, was ye?"

Smith nodded slightly to McCarty and feebly extended a hand. "I feel—differently—toward the doctor," he whispered gutturally, yielding to the urgency, but fearful of this first test of his voice.

"That's it, that's it!" cried the exultant alderman. "We'll all pull togither fr'm now on, eh? Oh, ye ain't got a ghost av a show, Doc," he chuckled, as he slapped Loring roundly upon the shoulder. "So why not climb into th' bandwagon before she starts, eh? But—" lowering his voice cautiously —"jist a word, Doc, in private."

Loring bowed gravely and followed him into the bedroom.

"Is he—is he goin' to be off his nut, Doc?" whispered McCarty, loud enough to have been heard in the street. "I don't like th' look in his eyes! 'Tis wild-like!"

"As I have told you, McCarty," Loring replied, in his most professional manner, "there are frequent manifestations of

aberration. But it is my opinion that he will ultimately recover. While there seems to be a slight cerebral concussion, I think there is no cranial fracture."

"Eh? Oh-h," murmured the utterly uncomprehending alderman; "is it as bad as that!"

"And rest alone will cure him—a good, long rest," continued Loring.

"But—f'r how long, Doc?" was the anxious query.

"We will leave that to Dr. Voss," replied Loring. "I shall retire from the case to-day, at my own request. But there is the boy with my car. Come, now, and we will get him out into the air. And, McCarty, don't worry him with your talk. Give him a chance to straighten out."

Returning to the front room, McCarty and the doctor gently assisted Smith to his feet.

"It's thinner ye air, Y'r Honor," observed McCarty, in the tenderest tones he could command. Then he abruptly took Smith up in his brawny arms and bore him down the stairs to the waiting automobile.

They were many and diverse, the trains of thought that coursed through Smith's heated brain that cold, blustery afternoon, while the car glided over the frozen roads in the eerie winter light. In a sense he had dropped out of one world and into another totally dissimilar. Nor, he reflected, could this affect him greatly as concerned either family or business ties. His sole kin, his stern, hard-working mother, had laid down her burden years before, and left him to the mercies of a world that recognized no responsibility for his maintenance. But he had been quite self-sufficient; and this quality had naturally combined with an innate ethical sense to keep him from departing too far from the path of rectitude. He grew up an average man, educated by close contact with the commercial world, but with no definite ideals—and yet with characteristics which indicated other qualities of soul, latent and susceptible of unlimited development. After trying his hand at various crafts, from the stage to banking, he had at length settled down to commercial traveling, resolved to hold to that the rest of his days. And thus he became a wanderer, without definite place of abode or

aught that he might call home. His easy-going qualities procured him friends and a welcome anywhere; and his laughing acceptance of himself as a "dead failure" early and completely removed him from the taunt of ambition, and thereby conduced to render life the easier. He was companionable, approachable, hospitable, yet never low. In short, he seemed to belong to that large class of humanity who stand always on the dividing line between the good and the bad, the great and the mediocre. Any chance throw of Fate's dice would send him one way or the other. He had been wont to reflect on his status in times past, and to believe that he had within him the ability to do great things, were some crisis to arise to call it forth. But his lot seemed definitely cast among the commonplace, and he had shrugged his shoulders and, as was his wont with every caprice of fortune, laughingly accepted it.

As for his present predicament, he was largely responsible that he remained in it. On the first night, the rapidity with which event chased event had left him small choice. The desperation of Taft and Loring enforced his obedience. Moreover, his own inbred love of the dramatic and adventurous had blinded him in a measure to his danger; his hourly increasing amazement that such a desperate experiment could be successfully conducted, conduced to hold him to the game; and, before he was fully aware of Loring's plans, he was hopelessly enmeshed and presented to the complaisant people of Filbert as their chief executive.

He gasped now as he thought of it, sitting there in the car beside his political lieutenant, the burly William McCarty. And yet, that thought caused him less real annoyance than did the burning desire for a cigarette, aroused in him by the fragrant smoke from the alderman's enormous cigar.

From time to time, looking out through the frosted windows, Smith caught glimpses of buildings and objects about which he fain would have made inquiry. But the menace of his position held him silent, although once, his guard momentarily relaxed, a remark on the execrable condition of the pavement did escape him, leaving him pale.

" 'Tis bad, Y'r Honor," assented McCarty. "But ye didn't ixpict it to last; and"—with a chuckle and a nudge—"ricollict th' rake-off, eh?"

The unanticipated reply shocked Smith into another train of thought, and he sank back to wonder if perhaps his opportunity at last might not have arrived, however unforeseen the guise.

The halting of the car before the Moller livery barn roused him from his reflection. A moment later his lieutenant from the first ward, sleek and well-nourished, bulky of form, with rounded paunch, leering countenance, and beady, squinting eyes, thrust himself, sweaty and ill-smelling, into the car and loudly congratulated the mayor on his rapid recovery. Smith gave a preliminary grunt of disgust, then braced himself and whispered an incoherent acknowledgment.

"Lucky for us you didn't slip, Gus!" exclaimed Moller, heartily. "Denman ain't slept much since your accident. I dropped in a couple times to see you, but the doctor wouldn't let you be disturbed. You know," his voice falling to a whisper, and his head jerking toward the front seat where sat Loring, "he ain't so bad after all. He's sure done right by you in this deal, ain't he? Well, be good to yourself, Gus, and don't lose any time getting back to form. There's a lot of things I want to thrash over with you. And the boys have all been feeling pretty blue. They're planning now to go to the city next week to buy hose. Well, so long!"

Loring reached back and closed the door. Then he threw on the clutch and hurried the car away. A few minutes later he drew up before the mayor's rooms and assisted McCarty to bear Smith up the stairway. And soon McCarty took his solicitous but noisy departure, and the doctor and his still dazed protegé were again alone.

"I am going to leave you now," said Loring, concluding his parting injunction. "I'd have to sometime, and it might as well be now as later. No evasion can be eternal, and I can't keep you mewed up here. But," with a wan smile, "your first appearance was a success."

He sank into a reflective mood, and remained thus for some minutes. Then he roused up with a sudden start and reached for his hat.

"I'm going to leave everything in your hands," he said, speaking hurriedly, and every syllable expressing the strain under which he labored. "You have grit, I know. We've both *got* to have it, or we're lost! Taft is nearly crazy, and you and I must buck up and save him, and ourselves!"

He rose unsteadily and stood for a moment motionless. Smith, facing his critical hour, sank limply back in his chair, his whole body throbbing with the hurried pulsation of his heart. Silence lay over them both. Then out of the stillness was heard again the doctor's voice.

"You will be alone, probably, until Voss calls this evening. It is what Schmidt would insist on, were he the patient."

With a feverish grasp of Smith's hand, Loring departed, leaving the bandaged and bewildered commercial traveler alone in the seat of the chief executive of Filbert.

CHAPTER 5

THAT the many thrills of nervous apprehension which Dr. Loring experienced after leaving Smith alone in the mayor's rooms were not baseless, might have been gleaned from the lively conversation which ensued the following morning in the private office of Royal Denman, where the temperamental Dr. Voss sat closeted with the lawyer.

"Now how's that again?" demanded Denman, his customary nasal twang rising impatiently. "You say Officer Burns summoned you last night?"

"At nine-thirty," Voss reiterated, "as I was about to call on the mayor. I hustled over there and found Schmidt dripping with perspiration and shaking like a leaf. He had torn the bandages off his head, but was trying frantically to replace them when I entered. And when I offered to adjust them for him, he actually fought me—wouldn't let

me come near him! Finally he got to the telephone and tried to call Loring. And then I left, after a word with Burns, for I didn't care to meet Loring again. He's in the County Medical Association, you know, and we members of the Filbert Academy of Medicine—"

"Eh? Yes, that's so," the lawyer commented absently.

"But Burns told me," Voss resumed, "that he was on his rounds, and was passing the mayor's stairway when he heard some one coming down. He halted, and so did the person in the hallway. Then he went in, and found a man there, all muffled up. Burns grabbed him, and in the struggle that followed the fellow's hat came off, and Burns recognized the mayor!"

"Out of his head, you think?" suggested Denman.

"Wild! Said he wasn't the mayor—that his name was Smith, and he could prove it—!"

Denman's attitude of studied indifference changed instantly, and he half rose from his chair. "Said—he—wasn't —the—mayor!" he exclaimed, with a display of nervous excitement which he did not attempt to check. "And what else?"

"Well," continued Voss, "it seems that after his first outburst of anger he got panic-stricken—trembled all over —face white as snow—and then he insisted just as strongly that he *was* the mayor, and that he didn't know what he had been doing. It's a queer case, as I see it!" The doctor settled back and gave himself up to dubious meditation.

Suddenly he started up, with an exclamation. *"Gott in Himmel!* Do you know? his face was painted with iodine, but there wasn't a drop of it on his head!"

"Eh? But—you say he wouldn't let you bandage it—"

"No; but I could see! And—now I remember: *there wasn't a scar!"*

"What!" Denman was on his feet.

At that moment the stenographer appeared at the door and announced the Honorable James Lawver, town supervisor and candidate for re-election in April. With a significant shake of his head at Dr. Voss, Denman composed himself to greet the newcomer.

"Well, James," he drawled, extending a hand, "what's it to be, now that the women can vote? Withdrawal?"

Lawver laughed coarsely as he sat down—the same coarse laugh that always accompanied his notoriously brutal treatment of his own family and of the dependent charges of the township. "Not much!" he loudly ejaculated. "I'm going to run now just to see how popular I am with the ladies!"

Denman's weazened, sallow features cracked with a feeble smile. "It's the boathouses and your forty-odd lodges, James, that you'll have to depend on to put you over. But what have the 'drys' been doing—anything yet?"

"Ain't heard a word, Den," replied Lawver. "Strange, too, for I expected Taft and Loring to bust things wide open the minute the suffrage bill passed. Wonder what's stopped 'em?"

"The fact that they must get a thousand names on their petition to submit the local option question to the voters, I guess," Denman guardedly suggested. "Have they begun to circulate their petition yet?"

"Ain't heard a word," again returned the supervisor.

"Well," continued Denman, with a sententious air, "they're going to fall down hard when they come to that, for—" leaning forward and squinting his eyes at Lawver "—they will never think to get enough male signers to carry their petition through, but will depend on the women. Then we'll have the petition thrown out on the technicality that the women have never voted before. See?"

Lawver leaned back with a loud laugh and slapped his knee.

"And here's another thing they don't know," Denman went on: "the signing of that petition must be done in a stipulated manner. For example, no ditto marks can be used. Lead pencils can't be used, either—unless they are indelible. Now we have instructed our workers to do a lot of talking to the 'drys' in such a way as to insure their making just the mistakes we want 'em to, so's we can have the petition thrown out. See? The 'drys' don't know a blooming thing about these little matters!"

He turned to the telephone to answer a call that came in at that moment. "Hello—Burns? Yes, come right over. I'm waiting to see you."

He replaced the receiver and turned to his companions with an ingratiating smile. "Come in later in the day," he suggested. "I've got an important interview now."

An hour later the stenographer again opened the door of the lawyer's private office, where sat Denman and the policeman. As she entered, she caught the latter's animated words:

"An' it was Sunday night, ye know, an' rainin' suds! I heard th' machine comin' like the devil! I ran out an' yelled to 'em to stop, but it whizzed by me like a cannon ball! But I got th' number, Mr. Denman, an' it was—here, I wrote it down!"

Denman took the paper and studied it for a moment, then turned to a drawer in his desk and scanned a card index.

"All right, Burns," he said, casually, and stifling a yawn. "Leave me now, and I'll see you later."

The number which the policeman had given the lawyer was that of Dr. Loring's car.

* * * * * *

Meantime, while Denman and his aids were thus discussing the mysterious developments of the past three days, callers at the office of Dr. Loring were met with the sign on the outer door: "Will Return At 1 P. M." And they went away, little suspecting that the doctor and Roger Taft were closeted in the dim little laboratory within, where the mental gloom was gathering ever thicker.

"I can't stand it any longer!" groaned Taft. "Every nerve in my body has snapped under the strain! The—that—that thing—in your vault—in the cemetery! What have you done with it? For God's sake, Loring, do—!"

"Roger," said the doctor, his voice sinking to a fluttering whisper, "I've *got* to tell you this—!" He paused. It was evident that his nervous system was cruelly overstrung—

Then, with explosive vehemence, as if to get the awful words out before they choked him:

"The body—Roger—*it is gone!*"

Taft's eyes went shut, then opened with the glitter indicative of inward hysteria. His mouth sagged, and across his dry lips sped a cry of terror.

"Gone! My God, Loring, don't tell me that!"

"Listen, Roger!" The doctor hurried on under the goad of wild apprehension. "That awful night there seemed but one course in our desperate plight—my vault in the new cemetery! The body could remain there while the atmospheric temperature was below freezing, until I could devise means of disposal for it after I had myself in hand again! But—late last night, while working at my desk, I suddenly thought of the key to the vault door! To still a vague uneasiness, I went to the drawer where I always keep it. It was not there! I became nervous—began to hunt for it—searched every nook of my house and office! I died a thousand deaths as I searched all night! Then the awful thought came to me that in my haste Sunday night I might have left the key in the door of the vault!"

"God!" gasped Taft, sinking back in his chair.

"And this morning, before daybreak, I drove out to the cemetery! In the door of the vault I found the key! And—"

He shuddered and drew his handkerchief to mop his dripping brow. Then, in his uncontrollable emotion, speaking so rapidly that his words telescoped upon one another:

"The door was—unlocked! I opened it, half fainting! My eyes nearly burst from their sockets when I saw the sepulcher empty, and the marble seal lying broken—"

With a hollow moan, Taft collapsed and slid from his chair, unconscious, to the floor.

* * * * * *

At noon, feeling that he could with safety leave his patient, Dr. Loring hurried down the steps of the Taft home, entered his car, and drove rapidly to the mayor's rooms. His mind demanded the relief of action. He felt, as he hurried over the hard roads, that his plans had woefully miscarried, that his conduct of the whole unfortunate affair had been miserably inadequate. He felt that he should have

made public the facts regarding the mayor's death, and thrown himself upon the people. But fear had driven him into the direst peril—not alone fear for his family, his personal safety, and that of his friend, Roger Taft, but fear lest suspicion falling upon them at the moment of launching the local option campaign should prove fatal to its success. If his plans could have materialized—if Smith could have enacted for a few days the desperate rôle assigned him, and then left town, as outlined—if the doctor could have disposed of the grewsome thing reposing in his vault in the new cemetery—then, indeed—!

But now complete exposure was preferable to killing suspense. With the mayor's body gone, Taft a wreck, Smith's conduct a demonstrated uncertainty, what remained but to take Smith before a justice, confess all, and clear his breast of the whole wretched story?

Thus dubiously musing, he mounted the worn, dirty steps to the mayor's rooms and entered without the ceremony of knocking.

He found the suite empty of human occupant. For a moment he stood staring about him confusedly. Then the suggestion smote him that Smith had been apprehended and taken to the office of Royal Denman, where at that moment he was doubtless relating the miserable tale to those eager listeners who would know best what coin to mint from it.

The thought drove him to desperation. Rushing from the room, he flung himself down the stairs and into his car. Throwing in the clutch, he turned the machine up the street, whirled around a corner, and dashed down the adjacent hill, little caring whither or with what result.

A half hour's mad driving along country roads in the cold wind served to restore somewhat his mental equipoise and afford him opportunity to adjust himself to his new determination. By the time he returned to the city limits he was again master of himself; and as he entered the western residential section he was actually anticipating the bizarre effect which the strange *denoûment* would produce in the phlegmatic citizens of Filbert.

As he turned into Clay Street, his attention was drawn to an automobile standing at the curb just ahead. Peering more sharply, he recognized Alderman McCarty beside the car, and beneath it, struggling with its refractory mechanism, the long form of City Attorney Shelby. He threw on the high speed and would have plunged past, his heart in his mouth, had not McCarty recognized him and wildly signalled him to stop.

"'Tis th' divil's own time we're havin', Doc!" sputtered the exasperated alderman. "But, bein's how ye air up on an-a-tommy, ye might git out an' di-agnoze th' case, eh? It's a crick in th' knuckle-j'int, I'm thinkin'—But where th' divil's 'is Honor?" he exclaimed, switching abruptly from his topic. "He was here a bit ago!"

At the last statement, Loring scrambled out of his car. "Who?" he demanded, seizing McCarty's thick arm.

"Th' mayor, Doc!" the alderman reiterated, anxiously. "We've had 'im f'r a drive! But he goes off 'is nut so frequent-like, an' whin a feller's laist ixpictin' it, that ye've got to kape y'r eye pinned to th' lapel av 'is coat—Now ain't that him down there? It is, bedad! Now do you come along, Doc, and help herd 'im in!"

McCarty started down the road, with Loring in close pursuit. In the middle of the block they came up with Smith, standing at the broken gate of a decrepit fence, and talking to a bright-faced little boy of some five or six years on the other side. The doctor, his face a study, paused a short distance from the engrossed pair, and laid a restraining hand on the alderman's arm.

"But why do you call me 'papa'?" they heard Smith ask.

"'Cause—'cause—" The little fellow hesitated in embarrassment. "But," he abruptly resumed, "you ain't cross to me to-day."

"Cross? Oh—Eh? Why, was I ever cross with you?"

The child looked at him with a puzzled expression. Then, with the sudden breaking of a smile: "You *are* my papa, ain't you?" He climbed upon the gate and raised his vivacious little face inquiringly.

Smith stood listening to the strange talk of the child as if fascinated. Dr. Loring stepped forward to interrupt further conversation. At the same time the door of the wretched little house opened, and a young woman appeared and called to the child.

Smith opened the gate and stepped into the yard. "May I bring him, madam?" he courteously offered, as he doffed his hat. "He and I seem to have struck up a queer little acquaintance—"

The woman glanced at him and shrank back. The fading afternoon light revealed to Smith an utterly incomprehensible expression on her face; but he continued to approach, still holding the child's hand.

"He mistook me for his father," he laughed awkwardly. "Called me 'papa' as I was passing the gate. He is a very —a very—attractive child, madam."

The woman stood staring at him as if stunned. Smith, when he had drawn near enough to see her face, likewise stopped and stood in embarrassment, his hat in one hand and the other still clinging to the boy. Loring and McCarty seemed riveted to the ground.

Then the woman reached forward, seized the child, and drew him quickly into the house, closing the door sharply in the face of the absorbed Smith.

McCarty broke the tension with a prolonged "G-a-w-d!" Smith turned and came slowly out to the street. Recognizing Loring, he held out a hand to the amazed doctor.

"Hello!" he said, cheerily. "Still on my trail, eh?"

"Th' machine's busted bad, Y'r Honor," offered McCarty, to cover his own embarrassment.

"Guess we'll walk then," replied Smith, imperturbably. "Come, Doctor. McCarty can go back and help Mr. Shelby."

He looked back for a moment at the door through which the woman had disappeared; then, turning eagerly to the doctor:

"Who is she? Mighty fine-looking woman to be living in such a shack!"

Loring all but wilted, while the lusty alderman stood gazing at Smith with mouth agape. Then the doctor seized

Smith's arm and started with him down the street, leaving McCarty staring after them with popping eyes.

"Look here!" Loring exclaimed, when they were out of hearing of the alderman. "You've put your foot in it—hard! How do you happen to be out driving with those two scoundrels, after the scene you made last night?"

"Oh," Smith returned, easily, "my rooms have been crowded all morning. Regular reception. Seemed to restore my confidence—I put it over on 'em all! I've recovered from the 'shakes' now—But, say! who is this woman?"

"Who was with you this morning?" demanded Loring, heedless of the question.

"Why, Moller, Mulligan, McCarty, Voss—I don't know who all. Came expecting to find me raving, I guess. You see, I lost my head last night when you left me alone, and nearly blew the whole deal!" He laughed at the embarrassing recollection.

The mention of the previous night caused Loring an involuntary shudder, as his thought reverted to his frenzied hunt for the vault key, and the subsequent horrifying revelation. And Smith's report of the experiences of the morning drew all his former fears back upon him in a rushing flood.

"Good heavens, man! What did you do or say? And," halting abruptly and staring at Smith's head, "where are your bandages?"

"I—I took 'em off," said Smith, hesitatingly. "But never mind that now. Tell me, who's this woman?"

Loring braced himself by a mighty effort. "I can't see that it makes any difference who she is," he said bitterly, as he remembered his resolution of the hour. "You and I are going down now to see a justice."

"Eh?" Smith stopped and looked fixedly at the doctor. Then, sensing the import of Loring's words, he drew himself up defiantly, and an obstinate look came into his face. "Say!" he cried. "I've been easy so far, and let you run this show; but now *I'm* going to take a hand myself! You tell me who this woman is, or I'll go back and ask Shelby!"

Loring thought of his family—and his face went white.

Despite his bold resolution, he could not permit Smith to do that! "I'll tell you," he said, speaking disjointedly. "Her name is Molly Vaughn. She was once a beautiful girl. Came from a French family, old settlers here. Schmidt—"

"Eh—what?" Smith again came to a halt, and turned upon the sorely tried doctor.

"Schmidt knew the family," the doctor hurried on. "And—well, her folks were suddenly reduced to poverty. All died off. And since then she has lived here alone."

"And the child?" Smith persisted.

"Hers—they say."

"Hers? So she has a husband? But why did the boy call me 'papa'?"

Loring hesitated. Then, in an undertone: "I don't know."

"Well, who is the child's father, and where is he?"

"Molly never would tell," was the quiet reply.

"Humph! Sounds to me like a raw deal!" His jaw squared and his fists closed tightly.

In silence they turned into Main Street, the doctor again bracing himself to put his resolution into effect, and Smith still brooding over his odd *rencontre*.

"By the way," observed the latter, after long reflection, "you spoke of a justice—"

"We'd better go and tell the whole thing!" muttered Loring through his set teeth.

Smith again dropped into revery, and they silently continued their way along the icy pavement. After a lapse of some minutes, Smith spoke.

"Wait, Doctor—until to-night. Come to me at midnight. I—I'd like to be alone for a while—There, there! You have my word that you will find me here," he added, as he turned in at the stairway which led to the mayor's rooms.

* * * * * *

Late that night Dr. Loring again nervously pushed open the unlatched door of the mayor's sitting room, and stood looking in at the solitary occupant.

"Come in," called Smith, cheerily, glancing up from the table where he had been writing by the uncertain light of the oil lamp.

"What are you doing?" asked Loring, apprehensively, as he closed the door and seated himself opposite Smith.

"Copying Schmidt's handwriting," replied the latter, with a queer little smile. "I'll need it, you know, for signing his name."

"But—you will not have to sign his name!" cried the doctor, a new alarm clutching at his pounding heart. "You are going to leave town—"

"That I am not!" returned Smith, with the semblance of a chuckle. "I'm going to stick for the big show. I am now the mayor of Filbert!"

CHAPTER 6

THE political status of Filbert had been considered unalterable for so many years that it had come to be regarded as institutional. One spoke of it as he would of the Soldiers' Monument, City Park, or Snipe's Misery—it was chronic. Likewise, it was Democratic; but in name only, for in practice it was a close corporation, greedier than the hungriest trust that ever battened on protective pap. At the head of the local Democracy had stood—for things stood in Filbert until death or decay overtook them—the Honorable August Schmidt, uncultured, unprogressive, uncompromising, and "wet." Back of him reposed the "machine," its parts so perfectly coördinating that their functioning was noiseless.

Opposed to the mayor and his organization, although by no means opposed to all for which he and the "ring" stood, was the dispirited Republican party, led by the gallant old war-horse, brevet-General David R. Diggin, proprietor and editor of the *Filbert Daily Budget*. Not unlike some three-fourths of Filbert's inhabitants, the general was something of a character. Physically, he was a man of large, commanding frame; mentally, he was the epitome of vigor,

inflexibility of opinion, blind intolerance, and domination. Whether he was first Republican and secondly American, or *vice versa,* had never been fully determined.

But, whatever the measure of his undoubted talent, the patriotic general was guilty of one egregious error, namely, he had failed to progress beyond the perilous years of '65. Indeed, it was as if he had struck root on the fields of glory, and ever after had viewed life only through his army glasses. Whatever the event thereafter, political or social, it had meaning for him only as measured against the stirring scenes of those disturbed times. Whatever the topic of discourse, and wherever the place, the campaign stump or the festal board, he never failed to steer the speech or conversation up to the Civil War and there moor it hard and fast. And thus, as water's constant dropping makes its ineffaceable record, so in time the simpler wits of Filbert came to believe that, without his noble sacrifice of self and service, the Union cause certainly must have suffered shipwreck. And little children, listening wide-eyed to his dramatic recitals of assaults and sieges, were wont to opine that the brave general, single-handed and alone, had put down the traitors and saved his imperiled country.

And the general was as inexorably partisan as he was patriotic. If his party was moribund, he would not see it. Had it died altogether, he never could have been brought to acknowledge it. And he was a thick-and-thin party supporter, always voting the straight ticket, never for the man. Regardless of the character of his party's candidate, were he rounder, thief, or shyster, the general would depict him in the editorial columns of the *Budget* in terms of such extravagant adulation that his opponents must perforce consider themselves mistaken in their hasty estimate of the subject. Indeed, there can be no doubt that, had Mephistopheles himself been the nominee of the Republican party, the general's vote would have been cast solidly for him, horns, spiked tail, and all; while, had white-robed Gabriel sought but the humble office of bridge tender under Democratic patronage, the general would have denounced him so ruthlessly and so exposed his character in the *Budget* that his fall from high Heaven would have been inevitable.

But the general was "wet." And thereby had the Republican party been split, and the contemplated local option issue rendered hopeless of success. In vain had Dr. Loring, Roger Taft, and a few others of similar broad vision and high ideals labored with the general. He stood like Gibraltar, scarred, but defiant. And so, in despair of reform by party politics, Loring and Taft had withdrawn their life-long allegiance and renounced their political affiliations for the common good. Gathering about them such substantial business men as Claver and Pendleton, to whom the local option issue was secondary to the complete ejection of the corrupt local administration and the elimination of the "ring" which had mulcted Filbert for long years, they had timidly launched the Civic League—a thing pitiably weak and scarce worthy of ridicule—and set about, half-heartedly, to secure the "managerial" form of government for their unfortunate city.

For some weeks after the organization of the Civic League Filbert had remained almost unaware of its existence, other than as a moral force in the community, standing as a continual protest against the present city administration. But on the Monday morning following the mayor's serious "accident" the lethargic inhabitants awoke to the momentous fact that the state legislature had passed the much-vilified bill granting limited suffrage to women. And then the foreboding among the "wets" became set conviction that Loring and Taft would immediately circulate their petition to bring the local option question before the now greatly augmented body of voters at the approaching spring election. True, the passing of the suffrage bill might have been anticipated by the liquor interests, had they not leaned so confidingly upon their astute mentor, the Honorable Royal Denman, who had literally camped in the legislative halls during the important session, and had dominated the drafting of the bill. As it was, his ready wit almost saved the day. For, when the bill had just passed its second reading, it was discovered that his sharp trickery had caused the omission of certain commas in the punctuation of its phrases, and the use of the word "six" instead

of the Roman numeral "VI." And this he had done, knowing that, were the bill to be passed in that form, the courts must subsequently annul the act and render it invalid. Happily, the irregularities had been detected just in time, and the bill passed. The lukewarm governor could find no excuse for withholding his signature; and, late in January, the act became a statute, leaving but two months for the "drys" of Filbert to conduct their campaign—if, indeed, they had not already abandoned the project—and secure the female vote, without which they could not hope for success.

Where now, roared General Diggin through the editorial columns of the *Budget* that Monday evening, were drifting such constitutional rights as the doctrine of "personal liberty"?—assuming that the right freely to dispense intoxicating liquors in the community were to be attacked. Where, indeed, was the people's reverence for the Scriptural superiority of the male sex? What did not this insanely foolish "feminist" movement forebode to man's age-long beneficent rule upon earth? And—momentous question! —was it thinkable that Filbert would now commit moral and economic suicide by voting her fifty-odd saloons out of business?

Through the week following, the "wets" lay with their ears to the ground, listening. The mayor's "accident" and his subsequent strange behavior might have disheartened them at the outset, had not Royal Denman apparently accepted the incident as casual, and calmly assured them of its unimportance, and had not Loring and Taft remained so unexpectedly inactive. Even the "feelers" which the "wets" threw out in the persons of "Clack" Harris, Willie Pond, and kindred spirits, to the Woman's Club and to the various influential members of the Ministerial Association and the Civic League, uncovered no information. Taft was ill. And the apparent reconciliation between the mayor and Dr. Loring, instead of arousing suspicion, had been seized upon eagerly by the "wets" as a most propitious omen.

What might have developed in this emergency, but for Smith's unexpected announcement of his determination to

remain in Filbert as mayor, is difficult to imagine. That decision aroused in Dr. Loring an equally inflexible determination to meet it, and, following the distressing incidents of the week and his enforced acceptance of Smith, to grimly buckle on his armor and set himself for the fray. How the doctor, running independently, had secured the election as coroner, was as incomprehensible to himself as to his political opponents. The fact had kept Royal Denman closeted with election judges and campaign leaders for many a day thereafter, until the cunning lawyer could discover plausible grounds for a contest. But Loring was a man of wealth. And, convinced that his election was fair, he threw wide the till and prepared to exhaust it in behalf of justice.

At this strained juncture Mayor Schmidt, candidate for further political honors, and fearing the consequences of a long and bitter fight with a man of Dr. Loring's ability and means, had suggested a compromise, and agreed to meet with Taft and the doctor in the former's office to discuss it. But the compromise was not effected. Fate intervened with a substitute. And the effect of that intervention upon the forthcoming election and subsequent political history of Filbert we have now to consider—for plain Charles Smith, who so inadvertently stepped into the limelight that dismal Sunday evening, cast a long shadow.

CHAPTER 7

ON Friday morning Dr. Loring was again at the mayor's rooms, and before their occupant had left his bed. The putative mayor rose languidly, waved the doctor to a seat, and began slowly to dress, first lighting a cigarette.

But the doctor did not take the chair assigned him. Instead, he paced rapidly back and forth through the room and relieved his bursting mind. Just how he would shape circumstances, he could not clearly state. The problem now seemed complicated beyond hope of solution.

"Look here, Doctor," put in Smith, his eyes following the

nervously pacing man, "can't you see that the disappearance of Schmidt's body puts the trump card into my hand? He wore my clothes, you remember, with my business cards and letters in the pockets. Well, that body is now the late Charles Smith, traveling salesman, formerly of Folsom, Ohio."

He went to the bureau and took out the wallet of money which Loring had given him on Wednesday. "Here," he said, "I can't keep this now, you know."

Loring glanced at the wallet in the extended hand, then struck it to the floor. "Does your word count for nothing?" he cried, passionately. "Will you deliberately ruin us and our dependents? Think, man, think!"

"That's just what I have been doing, Doctor," Smith replied, shortly. "And I've discovered that, for the first time in my monotonous existence, I've been given a chance. Now I'm going to improve it."

"You have prostituted your honor to the lure of Schmidt's fortune!" Loring ejaculated, white with mingled fear and anger.

Smith's eyebrows went up. "Well, the temptation does loom up pretty large," he admitted, with a slight toss of his head, "now that a week here among his cronies has restored my confidence, and I find myself reasonably certain of going through with the act. Of course, I may fail—Humph! It is for you and Mr. Taft to see that I don't!" He shrugged his shoulders as he drew on Schmidt's coat.

Loring stared at the man in new wonder, and not without a vagrant sense of admiration for his temerity. Then his thought turned to the vital political issue. "But—the campaign!" he exclaimed. "If you remain—and assuming that your deception is not exposed—what will you do?"

"Oh," answered Smith, easily, "jump into the fight too, I suppose. You see, I'm a brewer now, and have two saloons besides. And all my friends are 'wet,' you know—excepting you."

"What!" Loring stopped in his tracks. "You—mean—?"

"I'll have to, won't I?" asked Smith, doggedly.

"And you will support—"

"The 'wets,' naturally," Smith finished, turning away and suppressing a yawn.

"That you shall not—!"

"Eh?" Smith wheeled upon the doctor. "Look here, my friend," he said in a low tone and drawing down his brows, "don't let me hear any threats! I owe you something for the opportunity you have unintentionally given me. I was desperately tired of life—and you have made possible for me a new existence. I'd be a fool to blow the chance!"

Then his manner relaxed, and a smile of peculiar meaning lighted his face. "It's ridiculously easy!" he said.

"But it is only for a little while?" pleaded Loring, clinging to his remnant of hope. "You will go away in a few days, as you agreed?"

Smith shook his head. "Impossible—now."

"Then, by G—!" Loring raised his arms menacingly.

"Say, man!" Smith pulled the doctor's arms down and laughed into his face. "I've called your bluff; I've got the strangle hold on you, and you know it. But I'm not going to clinch it as long as you tote fair. Remember, I am taking just as many chances as you are. But I've made up my mind to be mayor of this burg, now that I'm already in office. We'll be enemies, if you wish, same as you and Schmidt were. But don't try to put anything over on me, and don't threaten. I am in politics now, and I'm 'wet.' And I shall remain 'wet' just as long as my interests lie in that direction. Now I'm going to the hotel for breakfast."

The door closed after him, leaving the doctor stunned. The ringing of the telephone bell shocked the man back into himself. It was Miss Caroline Hazard, President of the Woman's Club, and she wished to request of the mayor permission to appear at the council meeting on the following Monday evening in behalf of the United Charities.

Loring's first impulse was to pour the whole story of the fraud into the receiver. But he stifled it and asked for an interview with the young woman instead. Then he turned and made his way confusedly toward the door.

Passing the open fireplace, where a few coals smudged fitfully, his eye was attracted by a paper of documentary appearance lying partly consumed in the ashes. He stooped and drew it out. A little cry escaped him, and he carried it hastily to the window to examine it more closely.

"Schmidt's will!" he exclaimed. "Ha! As I thought! Leaves everything to Greta Schwartz! And Smith discovered it—learned from it what property the mayor possessed, and that it would fall to her—and then tried to destroy it! And—ah! so that's why he—the brazen rascal—!"

He stood for a moment, as if deliberating. Then, after a furtive glance about the room, he hastened to the table, quickly wrapped the charred will in a newspaper, and thrust it into his overcoat, muttering: "Why did Schmidt take it from his box? Was he going to alter it? Or did he apprehend trouble with Taft and me Sunday night? I wonder."

Then he took his departure.

* * * * * *

It cannot be refuted that, in a world of beings constituted physically as are mankind, a double exists somewhere for almost every individual. But it is also true that the resemblance is physical only, and never extends to qualities of soul and mind.

Had Charles Smith known this, his confidence might not have been so great, as he sat alone at his table in the barn-like dining room of the Bulwer House that morning, intent upon his plans. These, while in outline only, had to do almost solely with the former mayor's financial interests. At times a vagrant thought of Greta Schwartz cast its shadow upon his mind; at times he found himself mulling over the doctor's meager story of the little fellow who had called him "papa" the preceding afternoon. But to the forthcoming political campaign and his own probable part in it, he gave scant consideration. At times, when he looked into the future, the sight daunted him. Again, his strained mental gaze met but the glowing lure of fortune and the gambler's hazard, the cast of life itself for a tremendous stake. If he lost, it meant, at most, only the termination

of a colorless existence which, looking back upon it now, seemed scarce worth the struggle. If he won, a new life, free from the pinch of economy, and with every avenue of opportunity invitingly open, stretched before him. He knew that the disappearance of the mayor's body augmented his own chance of success. Ghouls had been operating in near-by towns, he learned from the newspapers. Doubtless the body of the defunct Charles Smith had passed through their hands and into the vats of one of the medical colleges in the big city which lay but a few hours distant. He laughed as he reflected upon it. And then, of a sudden, his thought seemed to pass under a cloud. He raised his head—and looked into the piercing eyes of Royal Denman.

Denman's face instantly changed expression. His waxen features lighted pleasantly, and he extended a bony hand in affected greeting.

"Mighty glad to see you out again, Gus! Hope you haven't taken off the bandage too soon."

He sat down opposite Smith, and for a few moments eyed him narrowly. But apparently his scrutiny yielded him nothing tangible.

"Met Loring coming out of his office just now with the 'dry' petition," he ventured, as if to lead Smith out. "Told him I'd head it with my name if he'd let me; but he didn't seem in a jocular mood. Er—seen him to-day?"

Smith sensed the man's suspicion, and felt the necessity to reply, but wavered between truth and falsehood, fearful to commit himself. Then, his confidence returning, he lifted his shoulders and answered, gruffly:

"He came to examine my head this morning."

He wondered, as he strove to withstand Denman's steady gaze without flinching, whether his manner of speaking at all resembled Schmidt's. His voice did, he knew, for so Loring had assured him; and his ready acceptance by McCarty and Moller also bore testimony to the fact. As for his manner, he could take refuge in the suspicion of mental aberration which his "accident" had brought upon him, and assume various characteristics until he should hit upon

those which Denman and his associates should find least difficulty in reconciling to their concept of the mayor.

As he sat musing upon these things, a spirit of bravado suddenly seized him and urged a test of his histrionic powers. Obeying it, he swept his arm impulsively across the table and hurled his glass of water to the floor.

"Why didn't you jerk the petition away from him," he shouted, "and kick him into the street? Haven't you yokels brains enough to keep this town from putting on skirts?"

Instantly he knew that he had correctly interpreted his difficult rôle. Denman seemed to manifest no surprise, nor did the waitress, who approached leisurely and gathered up the fragments of glass.

"Keep your head, Gus," drawled the lawyer. "You'll need it in the campaign. We're facing a big fight—though it won't do to let the opposition know we think so—and the sooner you're ready to get back into the harness, the better it will be for us all."

"I'm ready now," growled Smith, truculently, his hand trembling in spite of himself as he folded his napkin.

Denman eyed Smith doubtfully for a moment, then settled back in his chair, with his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, his legs stretched out beneath the table, and his sharp chin boring into his chest.

"As I told you last week, Gus," he went on, reflectively, "we've got the measure of every one on the other side but Caroline Hazard—"

"Who is she?" interrupted Smith. Then, immediately aware of his mistake, he sought to cover his confusion by pretending to hunt violently in his pockets for some indefinite article.

Denman glanced up quickly. His face was a study.

"Who's she, I say, that we should be afraid of her?" demanded Smith, with a quick assumption of bluster.

For a moment the two looked steadily into each other's eyes. "Well," Denman drawled, to all appearances satisfied with the question, "she's got the entire Woman's Club jumping through her fingers, for one thing. And, in addition, she has brains."

"Humph!" Smith grunted, quite at loss for more intelligible comment.

"Of course," continued Denman, "even if the town goes 'dry' they can't make you enforce the law. You see, with Lawver reëlected supervisor and selecting the juries, the 'drys' couldn't secure a single conviction against a saloonkeeper who continued to sell liquor in case we're defeated. By the way, Gus, that reminds me of Belle Glover. What have you done about her case?"

Smith shifted his position uneasily, hesitated, and then returned a guarded "Nothing."

"Better try to help her, I think," Denman advised. "She has influence down in the levee. She says she'll lose considerable, buying that lot and putting up her resort, if the street goes through. And Pendleton has money to fight her indefinitely."

Smith's reply was a bewildered monosyllable. Possibly nothing more was expected from him.

"I'm advising the boys," Denman pursued, "to clean up while they can. Push the cemetery fence ordinance through Monday night, sure! I've looked through the estimates, and Burdick and Company should have the award. Their bid is drawn with a duplicating clause that works right into our hands. If the fence lasts only a limited time, they agree to duplicate it for a certain sum. That is, they replace the fence and rebate the sum.

"Another thing," he added, "I see the aldermen opposing the new city hall are going to stand out indefinitely. All right, you beat 'em Monday night by appointing a building committee, composed of all the boys who are with you. The rest of 'em can cool their heels while watching the building go up. We need that new city hall, Gus—bad!"

It had been growing more and more apparent to Smith during this conversation that Dr. Loring's tutelage had left much to be desired in the way of preparation. True, the doctor had not anticipated its necessity. Smith had but himself to blame for the difficult position in which he was now floundering. These were the hazards involved in the desperate choice which he had made on Tuesday night, after

he had thought it all out alone in the mayor's dingy abode. But now, as he sat there facing the crafty lawyer, it seemed to him that the pounding of his heart was echoing in every corner of the room. In his confusion he took out a cigarette and lighted it.

Instantly Denman's face assumed a most peculiar expression. Smith paled, and a sensation of nausea seized him, as he realized his egregious blunder. Then he grasped at his fleeing wits and muttered:

"Cubebs! For my cold!"

He tossed the cigarette into his empty cup, with an enforced exclamation of disgust. Denman, a pallid smile creeping over his chalky features, reached quickly forward and took it from the cup. Instantly Smith seized him by the wrist and applied a sudden and severe torsion. The lawyer's diaphanous fingers relaxed, and the cigarette fell to the table. Smith recovered it and thrust it into his pocket. Then the two men sat back and stared blankly at each other.

Again Smith's wit came to his rescue. "I ain't so clean daffy that I need legal advice on cubebs!" he growled. Then, more affably: "Ever smoke 'em?"

"Y-e-s," answered Denman, with a prolonged nasal twang. "Er—peculiar odor they have," he added, with significant emphasis.

Smith rose, mumbling something quite unintelligible. Denman raised a detaining hand. "Wait a moment—Gus," he said, motioning him back to his seat. "This is the first chance I've had to talk with you since you got hurt. By the way," tipping his chair back and regarding Smith with a specious smile, "how did you happen to fall Sunday night, anyway? Weren't at Taft's little party, were you?"

Smith threw the lawyer a searching look. Then he shrugged himself together and scowled darkly. "Yes," he snarled—he thought Schmidt would have done so—"the little party he and Loring held in his office at midnight."

Denman stared at Smith in almost painful surprise. His mouth opened, but speech delayed within.

"Mulligan came," Smith plunged on, his confidence

growing with every word uttered, "but he wasn't invited, and didn't get in. After the party broke up I went to my Main Street place and had a few solos. Don't remember much that happened after that—but this is between you and me, understand?" He frowned upon Denman for a moment, then started away.

The lawyer roused up and followed. "Wait, Gus!" he called. "I want to ask about the Rockfield crowd. Had a letter from them yesterday. What was it they offered for your brewery?"

Smith halted, and stood playing for time.

"Eighty thousand, wasn't it?" Denman suggested.

The tension between them had now reached the breaking point, Smith knew. He quickly determined upon another bold stroke. "Look here!" he blared, "that's *my* affair, ain't it?"

Denman shrank back from Smith's sweeping gesture. "Oh, certainly!" he assented, apologetically. "Only, as things seem to be going, I thought—"

But his thought remained unvoiced, for Smith had gained the door and was well out of hearing when the lawyer reached this point in his argument. For a few moments he stood staring at the exit through which Smith had disappeared; then he left the dining room, passed down through the grimy lobby, and set his course up-street toward his office.

"It is possible, of course," he meditated, as he walked along with bent head, "that Loring *was* on his way to attend Schmidt when Officer Burns tried to stop him—but he wasn't going in that direction! And the telephone operator says she doesn't think Loring had a single call that night. There's something mighty wrong here, and I know it!"

Arrived at his office, he went directly to his private room and called Miss Greta Schwartz by telephone.

"The 'wet and dry' campaign has been launched," he announced, by way of preamble, when that young woman responded. "But I've been a little worried about Gus. What do you think?"

"Why, I am sure I don't know," replied Miss Greta, in

an anxious voice. "I'm afraid he went out too soon. Still, he always was headstrong, you know. But—he hasn't been to see me since he was hurt—"

"Oh, hasn't he? H'm!"

"And there are such awful rumors around about him. I don't know what to make of it all," she continued, in a tone of mingled worry and pique.

"Oh, he's coming along all right," Denman assured her. "But things piled up while he was sick, and he's been awfully busy, that's why you haven't seen him." And, having acquired the information he sought, he hung up the receiver and sat back with another loud "H'm!"

But with the primaries only a few weeks off, there was no time for idle speculation, and Denman soon found himself in demand in the outer office, where the bosses and ward heelers of the local Democracy were assembled for their daily caucus. Denman joined them, and immediately assumed leadership.

"I've got it all worked out," he announced, taking up the loose threads of their deliberations. "Lawver is determined to run, but we will also have another candidate for supervisor, put up by those Democrats who are ostensibly against him. I've selected Henry Auman for the place, and—"

"But what's the reason for splitting the ticket, Den?" interrupted Moller.

"To entangle the women," Denman quickly replied. "You see," leaning forward and speaking slowly, "we are going to catch 'em on the primary law. Lawver isn't popular with the women, and if he runs alone they're going to defeat him. So we'll have the so-called 'better' Democrats set up Auman, and then we'll induce the women to come out and vote for him at the primaries. According to the primary law, if you vote a party ticket at a primary election you cannot vote the ticket of any other party at subsequent primaries for a period of two years. Now we'll use the women's dislike of Lawver as a bait, to get them to come out to the primaries and vote for Auman, thus tying themselves up to the Democratic party for two years. If they do that, then, when a mayor and council are to be nominated

next spring, they can vote only the Democratic ticket at the primaries, thus taking their strength from the Citizens' ticket, which is certain to be put up."

"But," protested Lawver, with a wry face, "that defeats *me!*"

"Probably so," Denman calmly agreed. "But by sacrificing you we tie the women up to the Democratic party for two years, and insure the election of our own mayor and council next year, at the same time splitting their strength now as regards the local option issue."

"Anyway, Jim," put in Moller, with a fatuous grin, "you'll probably slide under the wire ahead of Auman at the last minute."

"Never mind, James," said Denman, waving a hand soothingly at the discomfited supervisor. "It's the best move we can make, and you've got to sit up and take your medicine for the general good. You can run for alderman next year, if you wish."

"What about Gus?" asked Moller at that juncture. "Run him again for mayor? And, say, ain't we goin' to be able to count on him for this 'wet and dry' fight?"

Denman hesitated, and sat nervously tapping his fingers on the table. Then, absently: "Gus isn't himself yet, and —I don't know. Don't bother him, boys. Let me handle him."

CHAPTER 8

EVENTS of profoundest import to the civic life of Filbert were nascent that crisp January morning. Charles Smith, settling himself firmly into the mayor's broad shoes, emerged through the creaking door of the Bulwer House and proceeded toward the council chambers, to assume for the first time his duties as chief executive. Schmidt's clothes hung loosely upon his spare frame, and his gait was a bit unsteady—all of which, though he knew it not, operated strongly in his favor. He had chosen Main Street for his walk to the city hall, as the less populated streets offered no advantage, and, moreover, the sooner he

faced the people the more quickly would his fate be determined. He had not the faintest idea what awaited him; and when a realization of this portentous fact came upon him, as it did with irritating frequency, he found it necessary to clutch desperately at his courage and shut his mental vision against prophecy.

It was a crystal morning, and the exhilarating air, flowing into Smith's heaving chest, seemed to inspire measureless courage to meet the inquisitive glances directed at him along his route. A few men bowed or greeted him formally, although none stopped to converse with him. Many of the women looked back and stared as he passed; and at times their muffled exclamations and whispered comments reached his ears. He tried to appear oblivious to it all as he strode on, with Schmidt's long coat obeying with undulant swing the swaying shoulder motion which Loring had told him to affect.

Arrived at the glass door on which Roger Taft's name was inscribed, he hesitated involuntarily, and a slight nervous tremor passed through his frame. Of a sudden his taut nerves quivered. A familiar voice fell upon his straining ears. He looked down into the eager face of Molly Vaughn's child.

"Papa!"

Smith glanced quickly about him. "Well!" he exclaimed—he knew not how else to hide his embarrassment from the passers-by—"How are you this morning?"

The child looked up at him with a puzzled expression; then, emboldened by the man's cordiality, reached out and put his hand into Smith's. "I'm all right," he piped. "And mama's in the ten-cent store. Oh, will you buy me a—a engine?"

Smith's sense of environment vanished in the surge of yearning for the love, the trust, the dependence which this child was so ready to extend to him. He smiled down into the animated little face; the smile was instantly reflected back in a joyous laugh. Then he yielded to the tug at his hand and followed the little fellow into the crowded store and to the gaudy tin locomotives. Soon the coveted toy was

in the child's hands, and with it a great bag of candies of uncertain quality. And then Smith turned and met the blank gaze of Molly Vaughn.

About them stood a curious, inquisitive throng, eagerly awaiting the encounter. Smith instantly raised his hat and saluted the woman. "The little fellow—will you permit him to accept these, ma'am? It will give me as great pleasure as him, I assure you."

A murmur went up from the gaping spectators. The woman's face became scarlet. She fell back a step and drew from her shabby purse a few small coins, which she handed to the amazed clerk in payment of Smith's purchases. Then she took the child's hand and led him quickly from the store.

A tall, uncouth man who, wide-eyed and gaping, had witnessed the scene, left the crowd and approached Smith excitedly. "Y'r Honor! Er—I seen ye come in! I bin waitin' f'r ye at th' council rooms! Mr. Denman's bin tryin' to git ye on th' wire—!"

Smith stared in abstraction at the stumbling fellow. His thought was only of the woman and her child.

"It's me—Mulligan, Y'r Honor!" gasped the man, his eyes nearly popping from his head and his red thatch beginning to rise.

"Eh? Oh, so it is!" Smith began to grow hot, as he sensed another blunder. Then, in his embarrassment, he turned and went hastily out of the store.

On the opposite side of the street he again saw Molly Vaughn and the child, hurrying rapidly along. Without hesitation, he crossed over and began to follow them. He surmised that she had completed her few meager purchases and was returning home. He noted her trim figure, clad though it was in cheap, frayed garments. Her carriage seemed to him to denote an aristocracy of thought that comported oddly with her fallen station. It was not as if, conscious of her low status, she was flaunting defiance in the faces of Filbert's righteous caste, but, on the contrary, as if congenital nobility of character were normally asserting itself, despite the sordid lot which she was accepting from her no whit superior fellow beings.

Just beyond the court house the child dropped a package, and stopped to recover it. Smith quickened his steps. The boy saw him coming, and recognized him. And while the woman was striving to hurry the reluctant little fellow along, Smith overtook them.

"I—I was going your way, ma'am," he began, deferentially, again raising his hat. His sense of courtesy had always been acute.

She crimsoned as she turned her big, dark eyes upon him in a penetrating gaze that seemed to sound the depths of his soul. He stood hesitant, and vaguely wondering what had drawn him to her. Then he saw the flush on her thin cheeks slowly fade. He saw an expression of wonder, of searching inquiry, come into her face; and then a look of undisguised astonishment. Her lips parted, but no sound issued. She seemed to be revolving a course of conduct to conform to a sudden revelation.

Then she drew nearer and looked searchingly up into his face. A faint gleam flickered across her eyes. A wisp of her loosely bound hair, caught by the breeze, brushed over his lips. He smiled awkwardly, and stepped back.

"I regret causing you embarrassment in the store—" he began. But then, and tardily, as was always the case, a reminder of the rôle which he was endeavoring to enact flashed through his brain, and he stopped abruptly to collect himself. He started afresh, on another tack. "I have been ill," he said, in a voice of dry intonation, "and am just getting out." He was by now wondering desperately what Schmidt would have done in the same embarrassing situation.

The boy came closer and took Smith's hand. Then a torrent of childish chatter covered the confusion of the man and woman. Without speaking, they both turned and, with the little fellow between them, resumed their course in the direction of her shabby abode.

Smith had begun to regret having sought to cultivate this woman, for it was plainly evident that a far different course of conduct was here demanded than by the complex

situations into which he had previously blundered. In the oasis of silence through which they were now journeying he had occasion to speculate on the woman's story, and the ill-defined motives which had urged him toward her. Loring had given him only dark hints, but they sufficed to arouse in Smith intense resentment of the injustice practiced upon the outcast woman, even granted that she had taken the step which, under our inhuman social code, brands woman alone with the great "Taboo!" Doubtless the conscienceless father of her child had thrown her over for a fresh attraction, and she, in deep humiliation, not only had allowed herself to sink, but had deliberately cast herself into shame and effacement. It was all quite natural, quite human. But, he mused, did the infamous social code bind him likewise to stone this unfortunate creature? And, even so, would not the supposition of mental aberration, which Dr. Loring had so fortuitously affixed to him, protect both himself and her from the venom of Filbert's character assassins?

Nevertheless, he was conscious of a blunder in having had anything to do with the woman without first learning more of her history. His fault of a lifetime, a too ready yielding to vagrant impulses, had at the outset still further complicated a rôle which, under the most favorable circumstances, was desperate in the extreme. He resolved to consult Loring after this before committing himself irrevocably.

He glanced down, and met the laughing eyes of the child. He did not see that the woman followed this action intently, and then watched his face closely for its effect upon him.

"Papa!" again exclaimed the child.

Smith threw the woman a furtive glance, but found nothing in her peculiar expression upon which he dared base a reply.

"You are going home with us, ain't you, papa?"

And yet it did not seem strange to the man to be thus addressed by the child. It only caused his thought to revert to the orphan home in Cleveland, which he had often visited, and where the little ones were wont to greet him with that same tender appellation on their fluttering lips. It was to

him but the pitiful voicing of a child's yearning for a parent whom it had never known.

"No," he answered, gently, "I must leave you at the next corner."

"But we're home already!" chirped the little fellow, grasping Smith's hand more firmly. Smith had forgotten the decrepit little dwelling's proximity to town.

Again Smith felt the woman's piercing scrutiny. He glanced up quickly, but her averted eyes veiled the fullness of what she had seen. His embarrassment increased.

"I—I must—go back to—to the office," he stammered, releasing the child's hand.

She passed through the gate without speaking, although he thought a faint smile fluttered on her lips. A flush of anger crept over him, and a baffling sense of chagrin. The child held back, reluctant to leave him. She turned at the door. "Come, Karl," she called.

Smith ground his heel into the sidewalk and started sullenly away. Then a malicious obstinacy took possession of him, and he halted and looked back. But the woman and child had disappeared into the house.

* * * * * *

If Charles Smith had been superstitious, his casual reflection on the fact that it was Friday might have suggested to him a sufficient source from which the various startling *denoûments* of the day had emanated. But when he entered the mayor's office, after leaving Molly Vaughn, the day of the week suggested only the speedy advent of Monday evening, when he must preside at the regular monthly meeting of the city council. This thought again left him cold.

Arrived at the council chambers for the first time—he had not known where they were until Dr. Loring pointed out their location a day or two before—he stopped, with his heart leaping wildly. Then he pulled himself together, and, with a movement of decision, entered.

The sole occupant rose with conciliatory haste and greeted him in a medley of hyphenated Celtic, borne on a rich Hibernian brogue.

"Hivins, Y'r Honor! 'Tis bad ye look! Have a little drap o' so'thin'—!"

Smith drew himself up with a jerk and went straight to the man. "Er—" he began weakly, striving to place him in memory, "I am a sick man—"

"An' ye don't need to be tellin' me that, Y'r Honor!" interrupted the sympathetic Irishman. "Fr'm y'r conduct in th' store I seen ye want y'rself, f'r ye didn't know me, Tom Mulligan, an' me city clerk f'r th' past tin year!"

Smith breathed a sigh of relief. He was being accepted at Loring's evaluation, and was grateful. "That's it, Mulligan," he replied in a low tone. "And I'm not fit for work. I—I seem to—well, to forget things so! Everything looks strange to me, and I don't seem to remember what I did before my accident."

It was a bold venture, and a feeling of panic seized Smith when the words were out.

"I knowed it, I knowed it, Y'r Honor!" exclaimed the clerk. "An' I—"

"Mulligan," put in Smith, exalted by his first success and speaking now in a tone that was almost sepulchral, "I'll have to depend upon you until my brain gets untangled. You must be my memory, and set me right when I blunder. Do you understand?"

Mulligan put an arm tenderly about him and led him to a large office chair. "Sit here at y'r desk," he said, solicitously, "an' don't attimpt to think."

Smith sank down in immense relief. Here was a being upon whom he might depend eternally, he reflected, with small chance of discovery. Were his political associates all cast in this infantile mold, he was certain of success in his dubious venture.

"Mulligan," he said to the great, awkward fellow, who had climbed back upon his high stool and now sat gazing at him with such an air of anxious concern, "talk to me. Talk politics. I want you to revive my memory. Tell me everything we've done this past year in the council. Get out the records of council proceedings, and all the reports of committees. Where's the list of city officials? And—

by the way, Mulligan, do you remember what I did with the schedule of my property? The last one made for the assessor, you know." He settled back in his chair and awaited results.

"We'll have ivirythin' in a minnit, Y'r Honor!" cried the helpful Mulligan, scrambling down to the floor again and shuffling off in search of the articles required. "An' I'll coach ye iviry day, until ye kin repeat th' proceedins backwards!"

While the clerk bustled sedulously about, Smith watched his movements and strove to assimilate the import of his words and actions, as well as every detail of the environment. "By the way," he at length ventured, as the insistent thought recurred to him, "that woman I met in the store—"

"Ah, Y'r Honor, that's a subject ye'd best not discuss!" the clerk exclaimed in interruption. "Wait till ye air restored. An' now," laying a pile of books and documents before Smith, "we'll go over—"

"Local politics, Mulligan," Smith broke in. "Close the doors and muffle the telephone until we've covered the whole situation!"

Mulligan stood back and stared at the man dully. Then he moved heavily away to the door, muttering under his breath: "'Tis changed ye air, sure. An' that soft manner don't become yez a dommed bit!"

CHAPTER 9

DR. LORING'S appointment with Miss Caroline Hazard had been set for two o'clock, and promptly at that hour, while Smith and Mulligan were feverishly searching the council's records of past maladministration, the doctor, his face grim and trenchant, and his stride indicative of defiance to every character that Fate might assume, rang the bell at the Hazard home and was received by Miss Caroline herself.

"We have launched the campaign," announced Loring, nervously, as he sat down. "And I have secured fifty names on the petition—"

"Yes?" interrupted Miss Hazard, leaning forward eagerly and unable to curb her enthusiasm. She was a woman in the early thirties, tall and slender, with hair slightly streaked with gray, and prominent brown eyes that changed to a scintillating black whenever her thought was stirred. She had been chosen president of the local Woman's Club that year, and, though it had not been so announced, it was commonly believed that the choice had fallen upon her as the one best qualified by education, experience, and an unusual talent for organization, to arouse the women of the city to a proper sense of their present great opportunity and duty.

"Yes? But—only fifty names! Why, Doctor, you will get nowhere at that rate!"

He fidgeted in his chair. "Yes, I know—but I have been so occupied this week that—I couldn't get at it until to-day." His words came in little jerks, and his face wore a troubled expression while he thus guardedly referred to the fateful week.

"But," he went on, hurriedly, "we must endeavor to make up for it in intensity. And now you—you will undertake the task of organizing the women for work in the campaign?"

Miss Hazard hesitated a moment, as if to marshal her thought. "Let me ask, Doctor," she finally said, "what sentiment did you discover among the business men upon whom you called this morning?"

"Oh," replied Loring, "the most varied. Gale, of the Traders' Bank, refused to sign. He is 'dry' at heart, I know, but was afraid his business would be hurt if it became known that he signed the petition."

"A disgusting exhibition of moral cowardice!" was Miss Hazard's quick comment.

"Maldon," the doctor continued, "refused to sign because, he said, he thought a man ought to be able to pass a saloon without going in."

"Humph!" Miss Hazard shrugged her shoulders. "Very sane and logical! An ideal reason for supporting the saloon, indeed! Gambling dives, opium dens, and every other

kind of vicious resort should be supported for the same reason! And I should advise people to refuse to be vaccinated, for they certainly ought to be able to pass the home of a smallpox patient without taking the disease, don't you think so? Well, what else?"

"Others, like Reese, refused to sign for fear that a 'dry' town would increase their taxes. Most of those who did sign were men who felt that their business interests would not be adversely affected by the elimination of the saloon."

"And no one had the moral stamina to sign because he knew it was right?"

"Very few. I had quite a time with Ball, the undertaker. He refused to sign because, he said, a 'wet' town made more business for him. And that is perfectly true, of course. And then he invited me to look over his books to prove his contention. But, on going over his accounts, I discovered that those of his patrons who paid promptly were 'dry,' while the poor pay and the 'dead beats' were drinking men and their families. So, you see, it really didn't pay him to be 'wet.' And he finally admitted it."

Miss Hazard laughed and her black eyes snapped. "Anything else?" she queried.

"Oh, yes—threats, warnings, and the like. Instead of advancing sound reasons for perpetuating the saloon, the 'wets' hint darkly at the boycott, destruction of business, low rents, commercial demoralization, and all sorts of disaster."

"The hiss of the snake in the grass!" said Miss Hazard. "You have but to menace the destructive business of the saloon, and you will receive a blast of its poisonous breath in your face! Society has the fundamental right to protect itself, but should it seek to assert that right the liquor interests would attempt retaliation with anarchy and chaos! Yes, I will undertake to organize the women. You need them. But you men of the Civic League must take the lead in this campaign. You must secure enough male signers to carry your petition, so as to obviate the possibility of having the petition rejected on the technicality that we women have never voted before. When you bring us your petition fully signed by the men, we women will go to work."

"But," cried Loring, in dismay, "that means further delay! We can do nothing without the women!"

"We shall work with you, Doctor," she said, evenly; "but for your sakes as well as ours we cannot permit the report to go forth that the men of Filbert are weak and that only the women and preachers stand for civic righteousness."

"But the women now have the vote, and they stand with the men in political matters!"

"In matters of civic interest," she amended. "Doctor," she went on animatedly, leaning forward and laying a hand upon his arm, "a tremendous power has just been given the women. Do you realize that once we women become involved in party politics that power will vanish? Our mighty influence is a function of our *political independence!* And so, while I am president of the Woman's Club, I shall make every effort to keep the women *out* of politics!"

Dr. Loring sat back, with a look of utter dejection. "Well," he said, hopelessly, "if that is your attitude we might as well quit right now!"

Miss Hazard laughed. "Why, Doctor," she returned, "I am only trying to make you men of the Civic League take the lead, while we women follow, working hand in hand with you. We will start this very afternoon to circulate a petition among the women, just to give you moral, if not legal, support. We will begin at once to make a complete polling list of the town, so as to eliminate illegal voters, as far as possible. Unfortunately, we are not under the election law, and so no registration is required. The list of legal voters must be made by a house to house canvass. But at the same time we will learn whether the people are 'wet' or 'dry'."

The doctor's expression lightened somewhat under his slowly reviving hope.

"Now," continued Miss Hazard, "when is your campaign secretary and publicity manager to arrive? The Civic League employs him, does it not?"

"Yes. Mr. Taft wired him Sunday night to report this week—" But the recurrent thought of Sunday night dug him like a spur, and he rose without completing the remark.

"And what has Mr. Taft done this week?" she asked. "I heard he was ill. Is he out again? Odd," she observed, "that the chairman of the Civic League and the mayor should both fall sick at the very beginning of the campaign. And I hear such strange things about the mayor. Tell me, is he really deranged?"

"Deranged!" ejaculated Loring. "He's crazy as a loon! He's positively wild! And—!"

He did not complete the remark, but seized his hat and started toward the door.

"Then," said Miss Hazard, "he will not go to the legislature?"

"Never!" muttered Loring. "He will end his days in an asylum!"

Miss Hazard stood for some minutes reflecting after the door had closed upon her caller. "We women certainly have a tremendous power," she murmured. "Simply stupendous! But there are three enemies opposing us: the liquor interests, the vice interests, and the big corporations. And—we shall defeat them all."

* * * * * *

As a result of his first hour's conference with Mulligan, Smith remained closeted with his unsuspecting henchman all that afternoon. Gradually, as Mulligan prodded his supposedly dormant memory into activity, Smith became aware of the magnitude and multiplicity of those deeds of the mayor and council which had at length provoked a long-suffering, tolerant citizenry into something more than a spasmodic attempt at civic betterment.

"Now here," Mulligan once reminded him, "is th' way ye handled the paving deal. Y'r stock in the consarn that furnished th' brick is in y'r safety deposit box, don't ye mind?" And Smith, with a sententious nod of his head, acknowledged the unknown fact and hurried to further evidence of past iniquity.

Late in the afternoon, Alderman McCarty dropped in with a certain Owen O'Toole in tow. Smith braced himself for the occasion.

"I'm thinking of spending a couple of thousand on my

place, Your Honor," announced O'Toole, after the preliminary greetings, "and putting in a bit of a cabaret, and so I come to see if 'twould be all right with you and the boys," with a nod in the direction of McCarty.

Smith's surprise found expression in the look of utter bewilderment that came into his face.

"'Tis a good place, Y'r Honor," put in McCarty, in support of the proposition. "An' 'twill pay most han'some."

"What's he contributin' now?" demanded Mulligan, in a business-like tone.

"What is it, O'Toole?" asked McCarty, shifting the question to the suppliant liquor dealer.

"I pay fifteen dollars a week to the city hall and ten extra to the chief and the boys," replied the man.

"An' th' ca-boo-ray 'll boost y'r receipts no less thin fifty per cint, eh?" suggested the calculating alderman.

"Hivins, no!" cried O'Toole in dismay. "Not more'n—"

"Arra, thin! 'Tis a live joint ye have," blustered McCarty. "An' ye air in a deestrikt what makes trouble f'r th' pólis. Th' Glover resort's nixt door, an' th' ladies'll be dancin' in y'r ca-boo-ray an' drawin' ye trade, an' ye know it! But there, man, we ain't goin' to be see-vere on yez! Ye kin fork over twinty-five dollars a week to th' hall, an' arrange as ye kin wid th' boys, eh, Y'r Honor?"

Smith's eyes gleamed with the light of sudden comprehension. He leaned back in his chair and studied the petitioner. The unfortunate fellow, now doubtless totally unfit for any other occupation than that of saloonkeeper, stood helpless, while the tentacles of the octopus Graft twined about him. Again, as often before that crowded afternoon, a feeling of nausea seized upon Smith, a sickening sense of the dirty business in which he had become enmeshed, and the lure of Schmidt's material possessions, and of place and power, diminished in intensity before a suggestion, faint and fleeting, of a better enactment of the rôle which he had so boldly assumed. He would have liked to know more about the man, but dared not expose his own ignorance.

"Your Honor!" pleaded O'Toole. "My wife and children, and my mother—!"

Smith squared his jaw and raised a detaining hand. "That's enough," he said, quietly. "Go ahead with your cabaret. We'll fix the terms later."

The trio heard the decision, and the soft tones in which it was rendered, in utmost amazement. Surely the mayor was no longer himself! When he could recover his breath, McCarty launched into a vehement protest; but Smith checked him with uplifted hand and a black, menacing scowl. McCarty evidently had had experience of such a scowl on the brow of the mayor, for he quickly subsided and humped his burly form into his chair, with his great head sunk between his shoulders like a huge toad. O'Toole, with extravagant expressions of gratitude, took his hurried departure, lest a change of heart come over the mayor; while Mulligan, with many a furtive glance at his superior, and many a dubious shake of his red head, bent again over his records.

Presently McCarty looked up. "Is it because ye've got enough, Gus, that ye air gittin' aisy on th' saloonkeepers?"

Smith thought quickly. He remembered his bold venture of the morning. With a resounding crash his clenched fist fell upon the desk. "No!" he roared, with an effort that rasped his throat. "It's because the 'drys' have started their campaign, and I ain't going to take any chances of losing a friend!"

With which McCarty came out of himself like an inflating balloon, and leaned over and seized Smith's hand. "Ye done right, Gus!" he exclaimed, his red face aglow. "Ye done right! An' it's me what says ye air a clever lad!"

* * * * * *

That night Dr. Loring, sitting alone in his office with his gloomy thoughts, received a telephone call to go to the mayor's rooms at once. A few minutes later he presented himself to Smith, who sat in the mayor's apartment at a table thickly littered with August Schmidt's papers which he had drawn from the bank that afternoon.

"Well?" demanded the doctor, in a voice that lacked somewhat in cordiality, now that he had recovered from the apprehension occasioned by the abrupt summons.

Smith waved him to a seat. "Voss was just here," he remarked, casually. "Examined my head."

Loring gasped, but quickly recovered himself. "What did he say?" he asked, feebly.

"Seemed to mutter a bit," was Smith's indifferent reply. "Didn't pay much attention to him, as I was busy with other matters. And now I want a word with you about the city's affairs. You said that Schmidt wanted to compromise with you last Sunday night. Well, I think I'd like to do the same. I understand the Civic League has tried to secure the managerial form of government for the city. I want to say that I am for it—provided you drop the local option issue."

Loring's eyes widened, but he tried to assume indifference. "And why the condition?" he asked, coldly, but greatly wondering what was coming.

"Because I am willing to step out of the mayor's office, but I want to retain his property," was Smith's bold reply.

The doctor stared at him in amazement. The audacity of the man was boundless! And the cool manner in which he exposed his mercenary motives gave a shock to Loring's moral sense. After some moments, in which he and Smith sat regarding each other intently, he said:

"So you found evidences of graft down at city hall, did you?"

"Graft!" Smith burst out. "Good Lord, Doctor! Why, the whole city administration is rotten with it! Have you any idea where your taxes go? Do you know what your city pavement really cost to install? Do you know that the city officials plan to rob the treasury and run the city hopelessly into debt next year if the 'drys' win? And the cemetery fence—do you know what that will cost? Then I'll inform you: only four thousand to install—but fifty thousand to the taxpayers! And the repairs on the Main Street bridge—why, man! it actually cost twenty-five hundred to make them, but the city paid into the treasury ten thousand for the purpose! Say!" his voice breaking with excitement, "you people have been asleep! You're too busy making a few dollars to see that you're being robbed blind right under your noses, and that by as brilliant a covey of politicians as ever stole prunes in a country store!

"Now listen," he went on, less vehemently, "all I want is time. If the 'drys' should by any chance win, the value of Schmidt's holdings, which consist of brewery and saloon property, would be cut to pieces. Postpone your local option agitation until next year, and give me time to cash in on his property. You 'drys' can't win, anyway. The cards are all stacked against you. I know from what I learned down at city hall to-day. But, if you will help me, I'll finance your campaign for the managerial form of government with the proceeds from Schmidt's property, then divide the balance with you and leave town for good. Are you agreed?"

Loring, whose lips had been slowly curling as he listened, sat for some moments looking steadily into Smith's eyes. Then his reply came, in a low, freezing tone.

"Will you take your son with you when you leave town?"

Smith's eyes suddenly widened. "My son!" he echoed.

"Yes, the Vaughn child."

Smith sprang to his feet. In an instant it all flashed upon him. The story of her withdrawal from the world; her teaching the child to call Schmidt "papa"—he saw it all now! Oh, fool and blind!

He came to where the doctor sat, and bent over him. "Was—was Schmidt the father of—that child?" he asked, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

Loring nodded slowly. Smith drew himself up and went to a window, where he stood looking down upon the street.

The doctor rose and waited expectantly. Then, as Smith remained silent, he quietly withdrew.

CHAPTER 10

SMITH had been alone some minutes before he became aware of the fact. Then he turned from the window, threw himself heavily into a chair, and dropped his head upon his hands. The mesh of events in which he had become entangled in that short week was grown so intri-

cate, and the strain so great, that now his every thought limped into his brain dragging a shackle. In vain he sought to imagine the present but an extravagant dream; his tired thought would not penetrate beyond the gray mist from which he had emerged on Sunday night, when he had plunged, without a note of warning, from the monotonous highway of commonplace existence into this maelstrom. Whether he would be sucked into the black vortex, or eddied out again upon the rim from which he had fallen, he could not know. And yet, whatever his fate, he was now determined to meet it without flinching. This determination had root in a complication of motives. As a lowly component of the commercial world, no antithetical thoughts regarding his exemption from the temptations of wealth and power had ever disturbed his peace of mind. But now the lure of Schmidt's fortune was urging its insidious influence upon him. And there were other forces operating to hold him to the blundering enactment of his present rôle, not the least of which—though he unwillingly acknowledged it—was Molly Vaughn, of whose life-story he had so unwittingly become a part.

He drew Schmidt's watch from his pocket and listlessly studied it. The hour was eleven. Then, of a sudden, the odd fact occurred to him that he was now the proprietor of two saloons! And he fell to wondering vaguely where they were. And his brewery—were not his employes inquiring why their superior had found no time for his business interests since leaving the sickroom? He smiled ironically. The liquor business, he reflected, was one of the few that might be neglected without disaster.

Then his vagrant thought touched upon Greta Schwartz. Good heavens! he had quite forgotten the rumor of Schmidt's betrothal to her. And he had never as much as seen the woman!—would not know her, were he to meet her face to face! And how had Schmidt thought it possible to reconcile his marriage to her with his shameful relationship to Molly Vaughn and the child? And, now that he pondered it seriously, how had the mayor planned to work out of the dozens of other complications in which

Smith was certain he had been involved? Was it unlikely that Schmidt had regarded death as the only possible solution of his problems? Smith was ready to believe that he had.

He rose and put on his hat. He would not accept *that* solution—not, at least, until all other expedients had been exhausted! He took up the telephone directory and began to search for the location of his saloons. There was one under Schmidt's name only a few doors below. Thither he resolved to betake himself, with no other motive than the urge of expediency.

He found the place without difficulty, and quickly entered, lest sudden fear turn him back. The room was ablaze with lights, hazy with tobacco smoke, and dissonant with loud talk, boisterous laughter, and the strident jangle of a mechanical piano. From a rear room floated a ribald song, borne on a quavering female voice. Through the smoke he noted the life-size paintings of nude women on the walls, the ornate mural decorations, and the beveled mirrors and shimmering glass behind the bar. He stopped, and for a moment his head swam. A thrill of ownership passed through him. This was *his!*

The ringing of the cash-register stirred him again to activity. He made his way among the tables, through the moving throng, and passed behind the bar. The two white-clad bartenders came up to him at once and extended a tempered greeting, from which he immediately took his cue.

"What's doing while I was laid up?" he asked, brusquely, and with one of his habitually abrupt gestures which Loring had told him so greatly resembled Schmidt's.

"Business fine, Mr. Schmidt," replied one of the bartenders. "Everybody in to ask about you. Place crowded."

Smith grunted, then went quickly to the cash-register and rang it open. It was a mere formality, but he had often seen other saloonkeepers do the same—and it gave him additional time to think.

"Er—Belle Glover's in the back room, Mr. Schmidt," said one of the bartenders, in a cautious undertone. "She's been talking pretty rough."

It had become Smith's habit during these days of strain to do his thinking while in motion, and so he started toward the rear room, speculating apprehensively as to the next demand upon his wit. As he swung the wicket he confronted the same woman who had addressed him on Sunday night when he was making his way up the street from the train. She stood defiantly before him, her hands on her hips and her head cocked to one side, while her painted lips were curled in contemptuous scorn. "Humph!" she commented. "If you hadn't come I was going after you!"

His courage failed for a brief instant under her angry look, but he clutched it, jerked back his shoulders, then stared at her blankly as he waited.

"Do you know what Denman told me to-day?" she cried fiercely, drawing closer to Smith. "Pendleton's got the law on his side, and the street's going right smack through where my house is. Do you know I stand to lose three thousand dollars, and that you made an even thousand on the dirty deal? Say, do you know that, eh?"

The angry words conveyed nothing to Smith, but he grasped wildly at them. "Did Denman say that?" he demanded, loudly. "Tell me!" seizing her arms and crushing them until she winced. "Then you go back to the dog and tell him he lies!"

A murmur of astonishment welled up from the spectators who had crowded about the wicket. The amazed woman shrank back with a gasp. Smith, utterly unconscious of the possible consequences of his words, went on heedlessly.

"*I* am your friend—just keep your mind glued to that!" he shouted. "And you trot to me after this, instead of going to that—!" He checked himself abruptly, for he remembered that Denman and Schmidt had been co-workers, if not friends.

He went up to the gaping woman and seized her hand. "Keep the corners of your mouth up, little one," he said, more gently. "I'll fix everything right." Then he forced a laugh, and turned back into the barroom, closely followed by the curious, jostling crowd.

"Say, Gus!" A familiar voice sounded at his elbow. "Don't go losing what's left of your head! It's the wrong time!"

Smith wheeled to face John Moller. "Let's go to your office," suggested the latter, taking Smith's arm and gently persuading him toward the other end of the bar.

"No!" Smith planted himself firmly, and stood looking about in confusion. He had not the slightest idea where his office was located. "What I've got to say," he continued, roughly, "will be said right here!"

A dark shade crossed Moller's face. Smith thought desperately, but could evolve only a single recourse. "Come, have a drink," he said, quickly, and with a fluttering smile.

Again Smith's hazard won. Moller turned to the bar, gave his order, and drained his glass. Then he addressed Smith anxiously. "Look here, Gus, you ain't going to queer things, are you? That's fighting talk you gave Belle Glover; and Den's a bad man to make mad."

"Forget it," said Smith gently, but now too conscious of a *faux pas*. "I say lots of things I don't mean since last Sunday night."

Moller threw him a peculiar look. Smith caught it, but covered his embarrassment by turning and loudly summoning the crowd to gather and drink at his expense—an invitation which met with unanimous acceptance, and had the desired effect of quenching the memory of his unfortunate remarks.

As they stood before the bar a slouching, unkempt man elbowed his way through the throng to Smith and gave him an extravagant greeting. "Tim Jordan says as how he seen ye Sunday night, Y'r Honor," he said, as he lurched against the bar. "Seen you an' Misther Taft comin' down th' stairs afore y'r accident. An' the poor devil yez had atween yez—Tim says dommed if he want drunker nor him!" He went off into a maudlin laugh at the recollection of Jordan's story.

Smith froze to the spot. The room whirled about him. Silence fell; then out of the awful stillness he heard Moller's voice.

"What's that, Gus? I ain't heard nothing about that."

"He lies!" burst from Smith involuntarily. In the intense suspense of the moment his voice broke and quavered. He made a spasmodic movement, as if to clutch the man's throat and stifle further disclosure. But the fellow had already launched another subject, and one that evidently lay much nearer his heart. Smith leaned limply against the bar and struggled with the fever and perturbation of his distraught mind.

"Let me tell yez," cried the intoxicated wretch, punctuating his rambling discourse with heavy gestures, "if this 'ere ol' town goes 'dry' it's goin' to kill bizness deader'n a mackerel! An' it's goin' to take th' bread right outer me own mouth!"

"How's that, Hoolan?" Smith heard some one ask.

The blear-eyed man raised his touseled head. "Me wife washes fer th' saloonkeepers—it's y'rself that knows, Y'r Honor," addressing Smith and making a clumsy effort to touch his battered hat. "She washes fer th' boys here," waving a hand dramatically toward the bartenders. "An' all I gotter say is that if these fool prohibition cranks shuts up th' saloons, it's their wives as will be doin' their own washin', an' th' bread will be took outer me pore childer's mouths!"

Smith silently thanked the Fates for this diversion. His composure now restored, he drew nearer the uncouth figure. "You are not going to vote against the saloons, are you?" he asked, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Me? Yez kin bet I ain't. 'Tain't th' duty of a good citizen an' Christian to vote agin th' saloons, it ain't!"

"How do you figure that out?" Smith asked.

"Arra, thin, Y'r Honor!" the fellow chuckled. "Don't th' Bible say yez should take a little wine f'r th' stomach's sake?"

"Say, Mike," called one of the spectators, "you want to tell that to the women. They've got the vote now."

The man's bloated face flushed with sudden anger. "Th' wimmen, is it, eh? Now, ain't it like th' poor, ignorant wimmen to mix in politics an' bizness what they don't

know nothin' about! Don't th' Bible tell th' wimmen if they wants to know anythin' to ask th' men? Eh? Yer dommed right it does! An' I'm fer th' Bible, iviry time!"

The same sense of nausea which had seized Smith that afternoon in the city hall again came upon him. He threw the man a look of deep disgust, and turned away.

"Going, Gus?" asked Moller. "I'll go 'long with you. I want to ask you—"

Smith veered about. "I'm going alone," he interrupted savagely. Whereupon he left the gaping crowd and stalked out.

The town clock was striking twelve as he left the saloon. His heart was beating rapidly and the blood boiled through their throbbing channels. Sleep was out of the question. He made his way slowly and meditatively up Main Street and past his own doorway. At the court house he paused. "It's a dirty business!" he muttered, under his breath. "But—who cares?" He shrugged his shoulders and continued his way. A few moments later he again checked himself, with an exclamation of surprise. He was standing before Molly Vaughn's house—and he was dully wondering why he was there.

A light gleamed from one of the windows, where the curtain was raised. Smith stood for a moment, with his hand upon the broken gate, and his thought revolving the dark story of the woman within. And *he* was supposed to—!

An unshaped motive urged upon him. He entered the yard and crept noiselessly to the window. On the little table in the shabby room stood a kitchen lamp. Beside it, bending close to her sewing, sat the woman. He wondered if the midnight hour always found her thus. How dark her hair—and what a contrast to the white cheeks! He drew closer, until his face almost touched the pane. And—

She looked up and saw him.

Muffling a scream, she rose and stood for a moment with her eyes riveted upon him. Then—what probably no other woman would have done in the circumstances—she came to the door.

"You had better come in, August," she said, in a low, steady voice.

He snatched off his hat and, flushed and embarrassed, silently obeyed. She closed the door after him and followed. Then she lowered the curtain at the window and turned again to face him. He thought, despite his confusion and shame, that she wore the strangest expression he had ever seen on a human face.

"Sit down—August," she said gently, taking her own chair.

He sank into the old, haircloth chair which she assigned him and shot her a startled glance. But she had resumed her sewing and was not looking at him. And then he wondered if perhaps Schmidt had not been wont to call thus. His roving glances wandered over her work and her thin, white fingers, moving so swiftly. And as he looked, he became increasingly ill at ease, until at length he could endure the silence no longer.

"You—work late," he ventured, in a faltering tone.

"Yes," she answered softly, and with averted eyes. "I must."

Silence again enveloped them. What could he say further in this, the most embarrassing situation into which a human being could fall! He shifted his eyes to her environment. If the exterior of the little dwelling were repellant, he reflected that the interior far more than compensated. The rag carpets were extraordinarily clean; the worn furniture free from dust; the paper on the walls was bright and tasty; and the small shelf of "classics" indicative of culture. Everywhere was ample testimony to an orderly, methodical mind, with tastes much above its present ability to externalize them materially.

And then he wondered anew why she had asked him to enter. It was not a request, but a command that she had voiced. And Smith, who had taken orders all his life, had felt an immediate impulsion to obey. In his present fatuous belief of voluntary acquiescence, he knew not that she had drawn him with a power that was irresistible.

At length she looked up from her sewing. "You have been busy," she said slowly, "since your recovery."

The irrelevant remark and her manner, now so entirely different from her incomprehensible conduct of the morning, plunged him still deeper into confusion. If what Loring had told him were true—

But what if Loring had deceived him! His face went scarlet. And yet, had she not confirmed the story herself by addressing him "August"?

Again she glanced up at him and smiled. And again he noted traces of a former beauty that he knew must have been unusual. He wondered how such a woman could have succumbed to any lure that a man of Schmidt's evil character could have offered. If Loring's dark hints were baseless—

"I was disturbed and unhappy this morning, August," she said, "but that has all passed now. Tell me," she went on, her face lighting with animation, "do you think the anti-saloon forces can possibly win?"

Once more he sat back in bewilderment, with his half-shaped deductions shattered. But she had asked this irrelevant question as innocently as if this were the most casual of conversations, held under circumstances of the strictest propriety, and he was under necessity to reply.

"No," he said, hesitatingly. "But—you do not want them to win. It would increase your taxes."

"It may be so," she returned, simply. "I saw them around with their petition to-day."

His interest was stimulated. Besides, this woman was accepting him without question, just as he had been accepted—as far as he could judge—by those who had known and associated with Schmidt for years.

"And did you sign?" he asked, somewhat more at ease.

Again she smiled oddly. "They do not want *my* name," she said. And she accompanied the remark with a quick, interrogating glance at Smith.

"Well," he went on, with a slight air of bravado, "they can't win. Why, they're not even going to get their petition signed up right! They're signing with lead pencils, making ditto marks, and so on. That nullifies the petition, for it's got to be signed just according to statutory form.

But—you will get out and vote? We want everybody—from the 'red light' district and all."

Instantly he wished his thoughtless words back. But before he could speak again a whimper from an adjoining room brought the woman quickly to her feet. "It is the boy," she said, her face aglow. "Will you come with me?"

Striving awkwardly to hide his confusion, he rose and accompanied her. In ever-increasing perplexity he watched her bend over the restless child and kiss it. He watched her every movement intently as she stroked its hair until it slept again. His brain was awhirl. He passed a hand across his hot forehead and struggled with his tangled thought. This innocent, wronged child was his—so the world believed. But did the mother? He wondered deeply, as he furtively glanced into her rapt face where, through the veil of sadness and shame, the image of the Madonna was mirrored forth. Could she have fallen, as Loring had hinted? Utterly impossible! He made an impulsive gesture, and mentally threw the whole story to the winds.

She looked up, and he thought her features transformed as he met her sweet smile. "My all," she murmured, touching the child's hair.

Smith's eyes filled, despite his effort at control; and he turned and strode back into the sitting room, muttering a deep execration under his breath. She soon joined him; and he went boldly to her.

"The little fellow—!" he blurted, forgetful of his rôle. "He hasn't had a square deal! The whole world's been against him! But it's going to be different now!" He drew out his purse and tossed it upon the table. "I—I have been—ill, you know," he stammered, as he looked into her upturned, smiling face. "I am not—not the same—"

She came to his rescue and stretched forth a mental hand. "You have changed, August, since your accident—is it not so?" she gently suggested.

"Yes!" eagerly. "I am not the man I was before!"

"You were near death—and you saw a great light," she prompted.

"I want to do the square thing by—by the boy—and

you!" he hurried on, fearful lest his courage fail. "I want to come to see you both—often—if you will let me."

"I understand, August," she replied.

He tried to speak again, but the words hung in his throat. Then he went quickly to the door.

"He called me—'papa'," he said tremulously, his hand on the knob. "I wish you would—" But he checked the too ready flow of his emotion. Would August Schmidt have spoken thus?

He jerked open the door and hurried out. But her odd little smile followed him into the night.

CHAPTER 11

CHARLES SMITH awoke the following morning with a new vision of the world, and for some moments lay striving to adjust himself to it. Then he slowly rose and sat on the edge of the bed, with teeth chattering and limbs atremble, while he lighted a cigarette. His breath congealed as it met the chill of the desolate room. He wondered how Schmidt, a man of wealth, could have lived in such a hole! He expanded his lungs and watched the frozen vapor issue from his mouth; and he reflected that life itself is but vapor—but, if harnessed like steam, what might it not accomplish!

Still vaguely wondering, he hastened out into the sitting room and began vigorously to stir the embers in the old-fashioned "base burner." Had a restraint been laid upon the expression of his own freedom of conduct? And by Molly Vaughn? No; it was the child!

He shivered into Schmidt's well-worn clothing. The multifold responsibilities which he had assumed that week weighed lightly in comparison with this new charge; and if the desperate venture into which he had plunged had held aught of real interest for him, it was forgotten now in the thought of the curly-haired little fellow who had entered life's race so unfairly handicapped.

He would marry Molly Vaughn!

It was another venture, as audacious as the assumption of the mayor's rôle. Not that he loved her—he had scarcely spent an hour in her presence, all told. But she had suffered a foul injustice; and well he knew that it would be impossible for him to sustain the rôle of mayor and continue August Schmidt's treatment of the woman. He was not so constituted—a further proof that similarity in "doubles" extends no farther than the flesh.

And then he stopped short in his dressing. What, after all, *had* been Schmidt's attitude toward the woman? He had to confess that he did not know. He tried again to harmonize her silence and strained conduct of their first meeting with her wholly different attitude of last night. In vain; she, like himself, had apparently enacted two parts that would not harmonize in this tense drama.

But, however much Charles Smith might believe himself concerned with Molly Vaughn only as a channel through which to reach her child and set him right before the world, another motive was subtly at work that frosty morning in the chambers of his disturbed mentality. For, though but an average man, as we have said, Smith was possessed of a rugged sense of justice and a conscience of at least average dimensions and sensitiveness. And that conscience had been at work with irritating insistence from the night that he first beheld in all its sordid allurement the temptation of Schmidt's fortune and prostrated himself before it. That temptation, through Molly Vaughn, might be transformed into a golden opportunity to really *earn* the right to the former mayor's property and justify himself in his own eyes and those of Taft and Loring. This done, August Schmidt would then have retrieved to some extent his offensive past and gained for his soul the peace which Smith sincerely hoped at that moment it might be enjoying. And so, with a lighter heart, the mayor of Filbert went to his breakfast in the cheerless Bulwer House that morning, and then betook himself to his desk in the city hall.

Sitting opposite the sedulous Mulligan a little later, Smith reflected agreeably that the crisis had been safely

passed. The strain—of almost a week's duration—had been immense, but it was slackening. He had borne the scrutiny of Schmidt's associates without flinching; he had even experienced a sense of enjoyment in gazing into the uncomprehending eyes of these people; at times there had come strong desires to tempt fate, and he had blustered forth with an assumption of the braggadocio which Loring had told him was characteristic of Schmidt, and had been met with a credulity that was amazing.

Under the circumstances, he felt fully justified in plunging into the vortex of action—but with the conviction that, to round out successfully his career as mayor and put into execution the plans which he was now evolving for Molly Vaughn's child, his conduct must be more than ever consistent. To save Schmidt's fortune intact he must labor vigorously to defeat the anti-saloon forces at the coming election. Then—for his conscience had not yet attained its maximum activity—he would dispose of his liquor interests at the first opportunity. And, if he remained in Filbert, he would gradually manifest a change of sentiment, until at length he should be found wholly on the side of reform. This slowly effected change might be attributed to a variety of causes—but all that could be worked out later and at leisure.

"You'll be goin' to th' meetin' of the Knights of Columbus to-night, Y'r Honor?" inquired Mulligan, glancing up from the records with which he was laboring to refresh the mayor's palsied memory.

Smith stared back at him blankly. Was the mayor also a Knight of Columbus? What next?

"Father Achtung, of th' German church, will be talkin' to th' boys," Mulligan amplified; "an' there's to be important business ferninst th' campaign, ye know. I doubt not ye'll hear a lively talk fr'm th' Father to-morrow marnin' after th' mass."

True, he was a German Catholic! Loring had warned him of it last Wednesday, but it had slipped his memory. And now he was wondering if, with all its other complications, the political issue was to become entangled with religious partisanship.

His unpleasant soliloquy was further interrupted by the garrulous clerk. And the latter's casual remark was not calculated to soothe in the least the putative mayor's agitated mind.

"Misther Schwartz waz in this marnin'," he observed. "Inquired after ye kindly, an' says as how ye ain't bin up to th' house since ye waz hurted. But I tole 'im ye waz that busy 'twould be a mortal sin to axe ye to attind to th' social graces ontil ye have catched up wi' th' rigular roo-teen agin."

Smith's raw nerves winced under another prod. Miss Greta Schwartz had not made her entrance as yet upon the stage where he was playing. He had resolved to see her immediately on making his fateful decision to remain in Filbert as mayor. The rumor of Schmidt's future marriage with her seemed then to fit well into his plans, for, was not her own fortune large? and if the lust of material possessions held Smith to the perilous hazard, was she not a concomitant part of the temptation?

But then, what of Molly Vaughn? He shook his head vigorously from side to side, as if to free it from its mesh of irritating thought. He was slowly becoming convinced that the formulation of plans was a futile expenditure of effort; he must meet each event as it arose, and with what wit he could instantly summon.

The morning wore quickly away, with but few and unimportant interruptions. Denman called him by telephone, but only to make certain casual inquiries; and to the replies to these the ready Mulligan gave instant and unerring prompting. At noon Smith left his work for a hurried luncheon alone in the hotel, and then returned to devote the remainder of the day to the tutelage of his devoted and unsuspecting assistant.

At nightfall, as he was getting into his overcoat and congratulating himself on these two days of almost unbroken instruction, he was summoned to the telephone by a call from Miss Greta. When he took the receiver from the grinning Mulligan, his hand shook.

Would he come up that evening? The receiver slipped

from his trembling fingers, but he recovered it and voiced a feeble affirmative. Then he shoved the beaming clerk rudely aside and hastened out of the room, without the formality of bidding him good-night.

* * * * * *

It would have saved both time and nervous energy had Smith tactfully inquired of Mulligan the address of Miss Schwartz before leaving the city hall that evening. But, on the other hand, a definite knowledge of the location and how most quickly to reach it, would have afforded him less time for preparation. A few minutes' search in the directory, a hurried survey of a soiled city map in the mayor's office, combined with a cautiously worded conversation with the tramway conductor, resulted in depositing him within a few blocks of her home, and when the town clock was tolling the hour of nine he mounted the steps with thumping heart and began a fumbling search for the bell.

"*Himmel!* iss it you, August?" exclaimed the puffing parent of Miss Greta. "Vell, vy do you come to diss door, ven you always come by de side door?"

Smith proffered no explanation, but dully followed the portly Teuton into the house and directly through the long hall to the sitting room, where two women were seated beside a library table. Both rose to greet him. Smith divined that they were mother and daughter. He bowed low, not daring to speak.

The elder woman came forward and extended her hand. Smith straightened up, took it, and began a stammering apology for his delayed call.

"*Doch, August,*" interrupted the woman, "*hast Du schon vergessen dasz Ich wenig Englisch spreche?*"

Smith stopped abruptly and looked hard at her. Then, as another complication loomed large before him, his pulse sank to a flutter. But she stood waiting, and he *must* reply.

"Er—Madam—that is, Mrs. Schwartz—you are right—" he began, feebly. "But—the—er—the—"

A realization of something awfully wrong swept over him, and he again halted. For a moment he stood uncertainly, while the trio stared at him with unmistakable

expressions of grave apprehension. The young woman turned to her father and said something in German. Smith could not understand a word of it, and the perspiration again burst out upon his forehead. He looked wildly about for some vagrant straw; then turned and sank heavily into the great chair which the head of the house evidently was occupying when this erratic caller arrived.

"Speak German, August!" Herr Schwartz admonished, in a shaky voice. "Or ain't you going to talk it no more? I didn't know you vas in earnest ven you said so last time."

Smith seized the cue. "I get muddled enough in English," he muttered, "since I took Loring's medicine—"

The porcine eyes of Herr Schwartz glistened with a new light. *"Mein Gott, August!"* he cried, "but dot's a bad bizness! I says to Greta I bet you Loring doped you ven he hat you alone, eh? *Himmel!"*

Smith studied hard for a moment. Then a pallid smile broke over his drawn features. "They—they've spread the report that I'm crazy," he offered, tentatively.

"Look, August!" exclaimed the excited Schwartz, "it's account of de election, eh? *Mein Gott,* ain't dot a crime!"

"I'm not saying anything," said Smith, in a low guttural. "Let them think so. But—"

The ringing of the door bell at that moment brought a sudden interruption. "Dot's de Sonnenbergs," announced Herr Schwartz. "Ve vas eggspecting 'em."

"We will go into the parlor," said Miss Greta, nodding to Smith and starting away. The latter rose slowly and, bowing courteously to Mrs. Schwartz—to the added consternation of that perplexed woman—followed Miss Greta through the library and into the massive parlor beyond, where she turned on the lights and, motioning him to be seated, took a chair facing him.

For the first time since he entered the house, Smith could collect himself sufficiently to notice the woman whom he was expected to marry. She was typically Saxon, tall, stout, and fair of complexion, with a profusion of flaxen hair. In one of the few calm moments which he experienced later that evening he reflected that she was not the

one whom he would have selected as a life companion, had Fate left the choice to him.

Miss Greta regarded him curiously for some moments; and Smith wondered whether he had been remiss in his manner of greeting her. Should he have kissed her? And should he now take her hand? How *did* Schmidt conduct himself in her presence, anyway? He would have given much to know at that moment.

But then, to explain his possible remissness and fill the painful conversational void, he fell back upon his wit. "I—I seem to—forget so many things," he offered, with a tinge of sadness in his voice. "But," he added, brightening under the thought, "I shall not forget to thank you for the beautiful flowers which you sent me daily."

"*Doch, August, doch!*" she deprecated, smiling indulgently and raising a hand. "It was all Dr. Loring would let me do. He wouldn't let me see you. Oh, August, I am *so* glad you got away from him at last! He is a dangerous man; and do you think—"

"Don't worry about me," he broke in, reassuringly. "I'm coming along fine! But don't mind if I do queer things now and then. I'm not myself yet, you know." He breathed easier now, as he settled back in his chair and assumed an air of confidence.

"And—*Gott sei dank, August!* you will be able to take part in the campaign, in spite of Loring's dastardly attempt to kill you."

His eyes widened and his brows went up. An exclamation sprang to his lips, but he stifled it.

"August," the young woman went on, now completely absorbed in the topic nearest her heart, "they are going to try to take the bread from our mouths. Think of it! They were out with their petition all day. Oh, when I saw Dr. Loring on the street this morning I could have clawed his eyes out!"

Smith sighed, and the sigh bore a hope that this buxom young lady's wrath might never be loosed upon himself.

"August," she continued earnestly, "I'm afraid—afraid of what the women will do. We must sell the brewery right away."

"Eh?" He sat up with a start.

"Oh, I know you have opposed it all along," she said. "But, August, I went to the Woman's Club this afternoon, and they're all stirred up. It's going to be an awful fight! And we must play safe and sell to the Rockfield people now."

A dozen different lines of thought strove for expression in Smith's mentality, but he held them all in check.

"That Hazard woman—she's at the bottom of it!" cried Miss Greta, with eyes ablaze. "I hissed when she talked this afternoon—the cat! Has she any right to say what business we shall or shall not engage in?"

For some moments she sat nursing her anger. Meanwhile, Smith tried to prepare himself for any sudden emergency.

"I've written her a letter," Miss Greta resumed, her lips curling with a sneer. "You're to mail it when you go home to-night. I didn't sign any name, but I told her plainly what would happen to her if she didn't stop her dirty work against us!"

Smith grunted. "They can't do anything, the women," he offered, soothingly. He felt safe in saying that much.

"They can, August, if they follow her lead!" cried the excited woman. "August, she's dangerous! She ought to be put out of the way! She's organizing the women now against us! Can't she be stopped, August? Can't something happen to her?"

He felt the necessity to reply, and yet the only sentiment that stimulated him in that moment was curiosity. "Who is this Caroline Hazard, anyway?" he suddenly asked.

Miss Greta threw him a look of perplexity. "Why—what do you mean?" she said, slowly.

Again he caught himself on the brink of the precipice. "Why, you know," he blustered. "What is there about her or her family that we can use? Any scandal, or such?"

Miss Greta shook her head. "No, nothing. We've got to deal with her alone. But she must be settled, provided she won't quit when she's warned!"

"And just how can that be done?" he asked, incredulously.

The woman leaned eagerly forward. "Kidnap her! Or —kill her!" she whispered, hoarsely.

Smith's ear drums nearly cracked under the impact. A sudden flood of anger surged up within him. His fists went shut; his eyes blazed. Miss Greta saw it, but gave it a false interpretation.

"Mr. Denman met me on the street this afternoon," she hurried on. "Belle Glover had been up to see him about the Pendleton suit. And she dropped a hint that's worth considering."

"Yes?" Smith had himself in hand again. "Well?"

"Tislin was in her place last night," continued Miss Greta, without trace of embarrassment. "Was disguised. Went there to get evidence, Belle says. Came in and looked around a bit, and then went out. But she recognized him. Hasn't he nerve, though! But, listen: I'll drop the hint to some of our women to send Caroline Hazard down there with him to get evidence—"

She hesitated, and sat looking expectantly into Smith's eyes.

"—Belle will take care of the rest," she continued, significantly.

If Smith had previously entertained a belief that the opposing forces would enter the local option campaign half-heartedly, he was now forced to accept an entirely different conviction. The deadly earnestness of the liquor interests was manifest to a degree that he had not supposed possible. And following it came an overwhelming sense of the importance of his own rôle in the death-struggle just being precipitated.

"As for the brewery," he again heard Miss Greta say, "it should be sold at once, regardless of the way election goes. For, even if we win, the 'drys' probably will try it again in two years. Oh, I sometimes wish you had let the Vaughns keep their property!" she cried, in a little burst of exasperation.

Vaughn! Why again this reference? Smith cudgeled his tired brain, but without result.

"But, August," the young woman continued, and with a

tinge of anxiety in her voice, "Mr. Denman thinks the 'drys' are going to try to make you out insane and send you to an asylum. I say, play the game with them, August! Lead 'em on! Make 'em so confident that they'll get slack! And then ditch 'em!"

For an hour or more Miss Greta went on in this strain, glad of the opportunity to voice her burning sentiments, and demanding little of Smith in reply. The call was finally terminated by the entrance of her parents, greatly to Smith's disappointment. But Herr Sonnenberg and his buxom *Frau* wished to extend their felicitations to the convalescent mayor; and the latter, although not called upon to say enough to jeopardize himself, nor to discuss any topic but his "accident" and the all-absorbing local option issue, was compelled to sit for another full hour, listening to their jargon of hyphenated English, before he could take his departure.

Miss Greta followed him to the door. Fortunately, he had taken the right direction to reach it unassisted. With hat and gloves in his hand, he hesitated. What was he now expected to do?

"Why, August!" Miss Greta exclaimed. "When did you take to wearing gloves?"

Smith stared at her uncomprehendingly for a moment, then thrust the gloves into his pocket. "They're not mine," he growled. "Loring left 'em."

She smiled her satisfaction with the reply, and handed him the anonymous letter to mail to Miss Hazard. Then she drew closer and put up her face to his.

His brain worked rapidly. He would take another chance. Quickly putting an arm about her ample waist, he bent and kissed her.

"August," she murmured, "you will not forget to come and take me to church in the morning?"

He delayed reply.

"Early mass," she reminded him, as she opened the door.

With an unintelligible grunt, he passed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER 12

REVOLVING his mind's full store of impressions, and congratulating himself on his successful call, Smith strode rapidly along the quiet thoroughfare. Of a sudden he bethought himself of the Knights of Columbus meeting, of which Mulligan had advised him that afternoon. Yes, it would be politic to attend, he soliloquized, suppressing the sense of fear aroused by the thought. But where would it be held? Had they a hall? He must ascertain at once.

Turning into Main Street at the city hall, he saw the new police wagon—for the purchase of which the passive and resigned voters of Filbert had disgorged a goodly sum—back up to the curb to discharge its contents. He waited curiously. Two policemen descended and roughly pulled out a wizened man, shabbily clad. Obeying his first impulse, as was always his wont, Smith turned and followed them into the office of the police magistrate.

Just what course the dispensing of justice might have taken had he not happened in at that moment, we may not say. But the presence of the mayor before the astonished magistrate most effectually sealed that simple dignitary's mouth.

Smith advanced boldly. "What's the charge?" he demanded, looking about with an air of defiance.

"Rough-house, Y'r Honor," offered one of the policemen, touching his helmet. "We nabbed 'im comin' out of a dive, and he tried to slug us."

Smith turned to the prisoner. "What's your name?" he asked, sharply.

The man put out his hands in piteous appeal. "Don't ask me!" he pleaded, in a hollow voice. "It is all a mistake! Let me—"

"He don't need to be tellin' of his name, Y'r Honor," spoke up the second officer. "He's th' very Riverind Misther Tislin, or me own name's not Officer Burns."

Smith started with surprise. This was the man of whom Miss Greta had spoken! He went up to the prisoner and scanned him closely. "Is that true?" he asked.

"Don't, don't!" moaned the unhappy man. "I can't answer! It's all a mistake!"

"Come with me," said Smith, taking his arm.

"Naw, Y'r Honor!" protested Officer Burns, stepping between the two. "It's too good to let pass—!"

Smith's anger flared forth instantly. He made a quick movement and pushed the astonished policeman out of the way. Burns staggered against the wall, recovered himself, and then bounded back, eyes ablaze and teeth set. Drawing his club, he raised it to strike. Smith caught the descending arm. With his free hand Burns tried to secure his pistol; but Smith seized his wrist and twisted it until a groan burst from the man's lips. The pistol dropped to the floor, and Burns fell back with a foul curse.

Smith went straight to him and thrust his face into that of the beaten officer. "You report to me Monday morning!" he said, in a controlled voice. "If I don't change my mind between now and then, you lose your star!"

Then he turned to the gaping prisoner. "Come," he commanded roughly, and started toward the door.

In silence the two made their way down the street to the mayor's rooms; and not until the ill-smelling oil lamp was lighted did Smith speak again.

"Sit down," he said, gruffly. "Now, Mr. Tislin, why did you visit Belle Glover's place again to-night?"

The minister burst into tears, and buried his haggard face in his hands. For some moments he moaned softly, while Smith grimly waited. Then he looked up. "Mr. Schmidt—God is my witness! I went there to see for myself if the awful conditions really existed—"

"Well? And you found that they did?"

"Oh, God! Yes, yes, yes! Far worse than reported! And the policemen who arrested me were collecting tribute from those women! God above!"

Smith gave a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "And what do you propose to do about it?" he asked, sarcastically. "Hold prayer meetings on the front steps?"

"Mr. Schmidt—something *must* be done! Cannot I plead with you? Have you no shred of moral—?"

He did not finish. For the first time he seemed to realize that he was speaking to the chief exponent of the liquor interests; and the realization brought with it a sense of utter hopelessness. He shook his head dolefully. "Let me go," he begged. "It is useless to talk further."

"Perhaps not," said Smith, quickly, and in a gentler tone. "Let's see, you propose to close the saloons in Filbert. Very well. And then, what?"

The minister raised his head and looked at Smith in perplexity. "I—I don't think I understand you," he said, hesitatingly.

"Let me speak more plainly, then, Mr. Tislin," Smith continued. "You are deliberately setting out to take away the means of livelihood from some three hundred people in Filbert by closing the saloons. May I ask you Christian workers just what you intend to give those unfortunate people in return? Sermons?"

The minister threw him a look of amazement, but kept silence. Smith went on calmly:

"I do not say whether your cause is right or wrong, Mr. Tislin. But I do know that it would be greatly aided were you to offer those whom you would throw out of employment something in return. My barkeepers now receive good wages. But if you arbitrarily close my saloons they will be forced to become competitors in the labor market, which, I would remind you, is already glutted. You preachers are advocates of progress along all lines; but you have overlooked the grave fact that lack of employment at a just wage is one of the greatest obstacles confronting you. You may not realize that there is more drunkenness from poverty than poverty from drunkenness. Yet you gladly welcome the rich man into your churches, although he may be grinding his employes to the point of driving them into the very saloons which you are so eager to close. Has that ever occurred to you?"

The Reverend Mr. Tislin did not answer. He was now struggling to reconcile his concept of August Schmidt to

the man who sat before him and spoke so fluently. Was the reported insanity of the mayor a baseless rumor? But where, indeed, had August Schmidt learned to talk like this?

"I have been reading of late about our social system," said Smith, narrowly watching his amazed auditor, "and I am almost forced to conclude that the Church itself is one of the greatest evils with which we have to contend. I should not be surprised if some day the thinking people of the world would launch a tremendous movement to close the churches and do away with the deceit and tyranny which they practice upon us. And, Mr. Tislin, if such a movement were started, you preachers would, almost to a man, think first of your bread and butter, just as the saloon-keepers of Filbert are doing to-night."

The Reverend Mr. Tislin's expression altered. "You are a Catholic," he retorted, his attitude now a curious blend of fear, pride, and defiance.

Smith again shrugged his shoulders. "I am—nothing! Nothing but a free-born American who comes from Missouri!"

The minister threw him a startled, suspicious look. "From Missouri!" he echoed, in an undertone. "Why—you came from Germany!"

Smith sat back and broke into a loud, sarcastic laugh. Then he shook his head as if to denote the uselessness of further discussion. "We'll not go into explanations," he said; "it would only take time, and I want to get rid of you. Now let me give you a parting bit of advice: Don't hurt your cause any further by visiting the dives. You've made an ass of yourself to-night. I'll help you out of this mess; but if you repeat it, you'll take all that's handed to you. Go home now, and when you say your prayers, thank the Lord you're not spending this night in the lock-up!"

He rose and opened the door, then motioned to the dazed clergyman to pass out.

When the door had closed on the Reverend Mr. Tislin, Smith went to his table and sat down. Then he reached into a pocket and drew out the anonymous letter which Miss Greta had given him to mail. For a moment he regarded

it curiously. A sneer curled his lips. "I'll see Miss Hazard first," he said. Then he held the obnoxious missive over the lamp until it took fire, and tossed it upon the hearth.

Another thought seemed to recur forcibly to him. He hurriedly took out his watch and consulted it. "The Knights of Columbus meeting!" he exclaimed aloud. "Too late," returning the watch to his pocket. "But—by George! I'm supposed to be a Catholic now. I wonder if the late August Schmidt had any literature on the subject among his effects. I'd like to post up on the church service before I escort the buxom Miss Greta to mass to-morrow."

* * * * * *

Sunday dawned bright and cold. Smith finished his cigarette before the glowing stove. He had breakfasted, and was ready for the day. "Heaven knows what it will bring forth!" he soliloquized, taking his hat and coat. "But I'm game."

And then he hesitated. He was the mayor, and opulent; why walk? The impulse found immediate externalization in the summoning of a taxicab, with which, a half hour later, he presented himself at the door of the Schwartz home, cool and confident.

"Why, August!" exclaimed Miss Greta in surprise. "Are you getting extravagant? I never knew you to ride before. You'll be owning an auto next!"

It was exactly what Smith had been revolving in his mind on the way; but he only gave a grunt, as he imagined Schmidt would have done, and quite ungraciously permitted the lady to enter the vehicle unassisted.

"Well," she began, when they were under way, "what did you think of General Diggin's editorial in the *Budget* last evening? My! but didn't he rip the 'drys' all to pieces?"

Smith uttered another grunt. It really was a simple manner of sustaining a conversation, and his heart welled with gratitude to the defunct Schmidt for having adopted it.

"I thought what he said about 'personal liberty' was fine!" she went on with animation. "And about the suffrage movement developing among women a race that will

not be either men or women, but, as he put it, just 'neutrals'."

"H'm!" reflected Smith, feeling that it was time to take part in the conversation. "Certainly; he's right. The proper business of woman is the raising of a family."

Miss Greta turned and directed a quizzical glance at him.

"And after that," he continued, with increasing vehemence, "she should be relegated to the fireside, with her knitting. Woman is getting out of her sphere, I tell you! It is man's business to govern. Why, as a politician the average woman is a shine!"

"Why, August!" exclaimed Miss Greta, regarding him with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. "I never heard you use those words before."

"Well," he replied quickly, "this campaign may make me say and do lots of things I never did before. You can expect 'most anything of me now."

She glanced at him with a half frightened look in her eyes. Her perplexity afforded him keen enjoyment, and stimulated further hazards.

"I tell you," he almost shouted, "woman's success as a politician is on a par with the minister's in advising the Almighty how to run things down here—!"

"Oh, August, hush!" she cried, now thoroughly alarmed by his strident voice and wild gesturing. "We are at the church!"

He laughed inwardly as he glanced out at the stream of humanity pouring into the large stone edifice. "Poor fools!" he murmured. But then he subsided; and when the car drew up to the curb his face was as scowling and repellant as ever Schmidt's could have been.

No detail of his environment escaped him as he entered the building. He could not recall ever having been in a Catholic church before, and his interest mounted with every step. Miss Greta went at once to the family pew. Smith, with eyes glued to the lights and trappings of the high altar, followed. He did not notice that she knelt at the entrance of the pew; and an instant later he stumbled over her and crashed loudly into the seat.

A titter rose from those who had witnessed the incident; and even the officiating priest, startled by the noise, turned and stared hard at the unwitting offender. Miss Greta took her seat with face scarlet; and some one, not wholly unacquainted with Schmidt's propensities, murmured an audible "Drunk again!" Smith turned quickly and searched the congregation for the perpetrator of the offensive remark. Could he have located him, he thought he would have punished him even there in the presence of the Sacred Host.

While the priest droned through the service, Smith's irreverent thought was anywhere but on matters theological. Sitting there, with his identity cloaked under Schmidt's personality, the surprising wizardry of his successful deception impressed him more deeply than at any previous time during that eventful week. He shuddered a little when his thought reverted to the death of the mayor, and its strange consequences; and he resolved to look no more into the future. The perspiration started from his pores again when he glanced furtively at the devout woman at his side, and tried to realize that she was his destined wife—betrothed, he reflected grimly, by proxy. And would he ever marry her?

A hazy vision of Molly Vaughn at times seemed to float before him; and as he followed it a sense of shame oppressed him—shame that his soul was become so sordid as to grovel in the mire for the tainted wealth of such as Schmidt and Greta Schwartz! Did he really uphold the liquor traffic from principle? Or were there, as he tried to convince himself, and as he had sought to show the Reverend Mr. Tislin, two sides to the great question? Oh, the latter, undoubtedly! But yet he felt uncomfortable as he watched the vision of Molly Vaughn, even though he did seek solace in the ungenerous thought of her as a fallen woman, an outcast, one with whom—

He was nudged back into material consciousness by Miss Greta. The service was concluded, and Father Achtung had come down to speak with the mayor. Smith immediately assumed a forbidding expression, and stood to greet the priest, who had already addressed Miss Greta in German.

"Good talk you gave, Father," he growled, anticipating the priest in the hope of diverting him from the language with which he was wholly unfamiliar.

"Thank you, August," replied Father Achtung, cordially. "You might tell Dr. Loring what I said." He winked facetiously at Miss Greta and smiled mischievously. Smith looked blank; the sermon had been delivered in German, and he had not understood a word of it.

"But, August," the priest resumed, "I am very glad to see you out again. And why weren't you at the meeting of the Knights last evening?"

"Too busy, Father," was Smith's quick reply. "What did you say to the boys?"

"Ach, August, die Frage ist lange!"

But Smith did not heed the words. He was deep in thought, for he had recognized his bartenders in the congregation and had seen Mike Hoolan crumpled up in a rear pew, Father Kennedy, of the Irish church, being out of town that day. Then—why not?—he shot the insistent question straight at the priest. "Look here, Father," he asked, "are you for or against the saloons?"

Smith thought, in the dead silence which followed, that he could hear the ticking of Schmidt's huge watch in his pocket. And in the glittering eyes of Father Achtung, as he held them with his own, he seemed to see something more than mere surprise. But the runaway impulse was still unchecked. "Tell me," he continued, "how many of Filbert's saloonkeepers and brewers are members of your congregation?"

"August!—Father, he has not been well!" Miss Greta, covered with confusion, pushed between them. "You must help me, Father, to help him!"

The priest regarded Smith sternly for a moment, then bowed gravely to her, without speaking. Smith, giving a slight shrug of his shoulders, yielded to Miss Greta's insistence and moved away with her, leaving Father Achtung looking after them with an expression of mixed anger, fear, and suspicion on his pallid face.

"Oh, August!" wailed Miss Greta, when they were again in the cab. "What has come over you? What—"

He turned sharply upon her. "Say!" he demanded, roughly, "couldn't I ask him a simple question?"

"But, August, you knew, without asking!"

"Eh? Oh, well—I—I had forgotten. It was just a matter of statistics, anyway," he hastily added. "And—but you can smooth it over with him, can't you?"

She did not reply; and they arrived in silence at the Schwartz home. Again he permitted her to alight unassisted, as he thought Schmidt would.

"You are coming in to dinner?" she asked in surprise, as he gave no indication of accompanying her. "But you always do! Why not to-day?"

He struggled for a reply. "I've got an appointment—with Loring," he stammered.

"What? Dr. Loring?" Her lips curled disdainfully.

He groped again. "To—to examine my head," he said, feebly.

Her face flushed with her mounting indignation. "Oh, very well," she replied frigidly, and turned away.

A moment later he was speeding back to his rooms. "The council meeting is to-morrow night," he muttered under his breath, as he drew a copy of *Robert's Rules* from his pocket; "and I've no time to waste!"

* * * * * *

Late that afternoon, while Miss Greta sat alone, nursing her wounded pride, and Smith lay on his bed in the mayor's dingy apartment, deep in the sleep which he so much needed, Molly Vaughn rose from her chair, laid aside her sewing, and prepared herself and little Karl for the street. She had sat long, musing over her work; and her fingers, so wontedly nimble, had stopped often and remained for long intervals inactive, while she looked off into space, or watched with unseeing eyes the boy at play. But the deep sigh which she drew as she arose indicated a decision at length reached, but only after a careful weighing of consequences and a further obliteration of self.

"They will win, and he will lose all," she murmured, as she left the house; "but we," glancing down at the child clinging to her hand, "shall be cared for, I know." A few

minutes later she wearily mounted the stairs to Dr. Loring's office and entered.

There were several patients, sitting about awaiting their turns; but she disregarded their wondering looks and went directly to the doctor's consultation room.

"It is *very* important," she said, quietly, when Loring, with eyes widening and lips framing remonstrances, admitted her. And she drew him aside and spoke hurriedly for some moments in an undertone. The doctor, his expression changing rapidly from surprise to fear, asked a final question, and then uttered a muffled exclamation, as he received her quick reply. Returning to the patient with whom he had been in consultation, he abruptly dismissed him, and then hastened through the reception room and out of the office, leaving word with the astonished callers that he would not return until evening.

Descending the steps, almost in a bound, he sprang into his car and tore madly up the street. The few pedestrians who saw the racing vehicle turned and stared after it with mouths agape. And those who, peering from their windows, saw it skid into the curb in front of Roger Taft's home, while the doctor flung himself from it and bolted into the house, set about at once spreading the sad intelligence by telephone and messenger that Mr. Taft's period of earthly probation had come to a sudden end.

But Roger Taft, though benumbed by fear, was physically sound. And when Loring burst in upon him, he sprang from his comfortable chair by the cheery hearth and hurried to meet his excited caller.

"Roger—the petition—is signed!" gasped the doctor.

Taft drew a long sigh of relief. "Well, why get excited over it? Sit down," drawing out a chair.

"But—good heavens!—it's signed *wrong!*" Dr. Loring fairly danced up and down in his agitation.

"Wrong?" Taft stared at him in bewilderment.

"And is absolutely *worthless!*"

"But—why, man! it has to be filed with the county clerk before five o'clock to-morrow evening! The clerk's office closes at that hour! How do you know it is signed wrong?"

"Half the names are written with a pencil! There are ditto marks all through it! The—"

Taft seized the paper and scanned it hurriedly. A moan of anguish escaped him. "Why, oh, why didn't you get the proper form of petition from the State Anti-Saloon League, and their instructions for having it signed up? They have a form of petition that has been tried out and found to stand the test. But now—"

"Why? You ask why?" shouted Loring. "If you hadn't played the woman this week and left me to assume the burden that was rightfully yours as chairman of the Civic League, this never would have happened! How did I know that the petition had to be signed in a certain manner?"

"But how did you learn that it was signed wrong?" asked Taft.

"Molly Vaughn came and told me this afternoon!"

"Molly Vaughn! Why—how did she know—"

"Smith gave the whole thing away to her! But—" He sprang suddenly from his chair. Drawing out his watch, he looked at it eagerly for a moment. "You have just thirty minutes to catch the train to the city! I'll wire the League headquarters there that you are coming! You can get the proper form of petition and their instructions, and get back here at three in the morning! We'll get the petition signed all over again to-morrow, and filed by five in the afternoon!"

Taft gasped. "We can't possibly—!"

"No, not if you stand there making obstacles!" cried Loring.

"But the obstacle is the physical impossibility of getting a thousand names on the petition in a single day!"

"And that obstacle can be blown to atoms with a little mental dynamite!" cried the doctor. "Before you get back I will telephone or see everybody who signed the petition and have them all prepared to sign again to-morrow! Come!"

Whereupon he seized the dazed Taft's arm and fairly dragged him up the stairs to his dressing room.

* * * * * *

Meanwhile, Charles Smith awoke, and lay for some

time revolving the thoughts with which he had been occupied when sleep overtook him. A week ago at that same hour he was crumpled up in a seat in the dingy smoking car, an impecunious nobody, homeless and jobless. Now, by the transmuting touch of Fate's wand, he was the mayor of Filbert and a personage of wealth and power. He rubbed his eyes and sat upright, half believing it all but a fantastic dream.

And then he fell back again upon the bed with a smile. It was true, all true! And yet he was obliged to confess that he found only a lukewarm satisfaction in the reflection. Something seemed to remind him of a tremendous opportunity lost for the want of that which transcends mere physical courage—moral stamina.

But, he argued, in yielding to the temptation—in staking his all upon the hazard to acquire Schmidt's property—was he not merely embracing a rare opportunity to free himself from the primal curse? And was there one in a million who would have done otherwise?

But the stinging sense of shame which had come upon him in his saloon Friday night had now returned; and the thought of his enforced companionship with brutal natures, and of the vile contamination which the assumption of his present rôle included—something that he had not realized before—produced a sickening sense of loathing.

He must harden himself to the life to which dire necessity now held him! And so he rose and hurried through his toilet, lest his animal courage fail, and set out again for his saloons.

He found them both open and thronged, defiantly violative of city ordinance and civic decency. He returned to the one which he had visited Friday night and entered, making his way slowly through the raff of low dive frequenters up to the bar. Loud voices fell upon his ears as he approached, and he found one of his bartenders in a heady altercation with a laboring man who had asked to have a check cashed. Smith reached out and took the paper from the man's hand. It was drawn by the railway company over whose line he himself had come to Filbert.

"Cash it," he commanded, handing it to the bartender. "It's good—and he's going to treat."

The bartender complied immediately. Smith passed down to the end of the bar and stood to watch the result. Again the lust of gold was loudly claimant within him.

The laborer, with twenty silver dollars in his itching palms, turned exultantly to the crowd. "Come on, boys!" he shouted. "Hey, you, Jim! And you, Tom! Buck up here! What'll you have?"

The rabble needed no urging, and quickly swarmed forward to give their orders. Smith eagerly watched the cash-register; the treat cost the laborer just three dollars. Smith laughed harshly. Then, with the urge of evil upon him, he began to circulate freely among his patrons, passing witty remarks and now and then slapping some coarse, drunken fellow upon the back. Soon some one else bought drinks for the crowd; then another. And again the laborer swaggered up to the bar and called to the "boys" to drink at his expense. Smith, fascinated, saw the bartender mulct him of five more of his toil-won dollars, and reflected that forty per cent of the man's wages had already passed into the saloon's yawning till. But in the exhilaration of the moment the reflection caused him no uneasiness.

With the stimulation produced by the increased drinking, the excitement waxed intense. From the rear of the reeking, smoke-dimmed room rose a quavering voice in a ribald song. The words were vile, the singing execrable. But Smith voiced an extravagant praise of both, and urged the others to join. And while the room rang with the vulgar din, the smiling bartenders set out another round of drinks. Then one of them approached a swaying figure down at the end of the bar and grasped him roughly by the shoulder. "Say, Bill," he cried, "ain't you going to pay for the drinks you ordered?"

The man addressed looked up heavily. His comprehension was slow in dawning, but he fumbled in a dirty pocket and listlessly produced a two-dollar bill. The bartender seized it and rang it up immediately, without returning any change to the befuddled victim.

Smith saw the procedure, and admired the skill displayed by his employe. He went behind the bar and ordered the thing repeated down at the other end of the room. The flattered bartender complied, and returned with three dollars, which Smith snatched and thrust into his own pockets. It was irresistible, exhilarating, this play! He nodded to his employes to fill the empty glasses again, and then he himself leaned over to the laborer whose check he had ordered cashed. "Say, you!" he bellowed. "How about paying for these drinks you ordered an hour ago, eh?"

The laborer stared in confusion at Smith. "Come on, ante!" commanded the latter, slapping the bar with his open hand.

The swaying laborer straightened up with a pitiable assumption of dignity. "John Rimes ain't the man to jump his honest debts!" he cried, holding out his hand with his remaining silver.

Smith quickly extracted four dollars from the diminished pile, and then summoned the crowd. "Come on, boys!" he called. "John stands treat again! Fill 'em up!" turning to the grinning bartenders. "Old John's got a stand-in with me, I tell you!"

The bartenders exchanged significant glances. "Gus is feeling pretty fine to-night," suggested one. The other nodded, and pointed a finger at his own head—a gesture which his companion acknowledged with a wink and a knowing smile.

Another patron had now ordered drinks for the house; but the flattered Rimes, steadying himself against the bar and throwing out his chest with pride, waved him aside with a dramatic sweep of his arm and threw down the rest of his money upon the bar.

"I'm buying now, I want you to know!" he shouted. "All you fellows got to do is drink, an' I foot th' bill! Th' mayor an' me—hic—is particular friends, an' this 'ere ol' town ain't goin' 'dry' as long's me an' him's in th' fight—eh, Gus?"

"That's right," agreed Smith, with a coarse laugh. Then he gathered up the balance of the laborer's wages. "John says 'Drink till it's gone,' eh, John? Crowd up, boys!"

Another low song burst from a drunken patron. Soon the room rang again with noisy discord. Some attempted clumsily to dance. Some shouted. Others cursed. Money flowed across the bar in an unbroken stream. Misery, squalor, degradation, and death flowed back in exchange for it. Painted women entered from the rear room and dragged the maudlin wrecks of humanity back with them. Policemen, attracted by the clamor, came in from the street and drank freely with the brawlers. Smith was the gayest of them all, though he drank not a drop. Nor did his two immaculate bartenders.

Two hours later John Rimes roused sluggishly from the table on which he had been lying in a drunken stupor. He shuffled painfully to his feet and started, stumbling, toward the door. Then he halted abruptly and fumbled in his pockets. When at length he grasped the fact that they were empty, he uttered a loud oath and lurched up to the bar.

"Where's my money?" he demanded, shaking a fist at Smith.

The latter turned to the bartenders. But they misinterpreted his look of interrogation, and came out and hustled the drunken laborer into the street.

Smith stood for a moment, looking after them. Then his face flushed, and he took his coat and hat and crept out of the saloon.

CHAPTER 13

AT four-thirty o'clock Monday afternoon Royal Denman sat in his private office, holding his watch in his hand. About the mahogany table with him were gathered Supervisor Lawver, Alderman McCarty, "Clack" Harris, and John Moller, as illustrious a bevy of ward heelers as ever oiled a political machine.

"Thirty minutes in which to file their petition," commented Denman, in his peculiar nasal twang. "Easy, wasn't it?" he added, turning to Lawver with a cunning grin.

"Perfect pudding!" replied the latter, stretching himself and indulging in a prolonged yawn.

"Where's Shelby?" asked Moller, projecting a stream of tobacco juice at the cuspidor. "Watching the 'drys'?"

"Oh, I sent him over to the county clerk's office, to see that no skulduggery went on there," explained Denman. He consulted his watch again. "Thirty minutes—and then we've got 'em for another year! And during that time we'll become better prepared to fight 'em!"

"Well," put in McCarty, somewhat dubiously, "I ain't a-goin' to count no chickens till they're hatched. I'm suspicious, I am, an' I don't mind sayin' it."

"Why, Bill?" drawled Denman, bending over the table and making fanciful sketches on the blotting pad.

"Well, f'r one thing," McCarty elucidated, "I seen a lot of 'dry' autos runnin' around to-day—more'n usual. An' I seen Taft trottin' about again. Thought he was sick, eh?"

Denman glanced up at the man sharply. "What else?" he asked, in a voice illy controlled.

"Oh, nothin'—but me wife tells me this noon she seen the 'dry' women an' Miss Hazard in our neighborhood again to-day."

"Well?"

"Well, they've been there once already, ain't they? Why go over th' same terry-torry again, if they want up to some shinnanigan, eh?"

Denman sat back and reflected. Then he turned to the others. "Have you fellows noticed anything out of the ordinary to-day?" he asked, his words betraying a growing apprehension.

"Not me," said Lawver, briskly. "I was out at the farm all day, and just got back. So I ain't seen nothing wrong."

Moller shook his head. But even as he did so, his expression changed. "Say!" he ejaculated. "Now I remember, Mike Hoolan told me this noon that the 'drys' were over at the power-house again—but he didn't know anything else—"

Denman interrupted him impatiently. "You fellows never have anything but your suspicions to offer! Why don't you get busy and find out something definite? If we're licked, it's because you are such a lot of blockheads!"

He turned to the telephone and called up the county clerk. "Er—the local option petition," he said, in a suave voice, "not been filed yet, I suppose?"

"Filed ten minutes ago," was the prompt reply.

Denman hung up the receiver with a quick, jerky movement, and sat back again, his face a study. "Filed—!" he echoed. "Well, it remains now to be seen whether—"

The door flew open and City Attorney Shelby flung himself into the room, his face flaming with anger. "Say," he demanded, in a loud, shaking voice, "which one of you fellows peached?" He threw his hat and gloves upon the table and dropped heavily into a chair.

The others sank back and stared at him blankly.

"The petition is filed!" he went on, his voice raised in declamation. "It has more than a thousand signatures! And, what's more, it is the form issued by the State Anti-Saloon League; and the signing is done right! Saturday I saw the petition they were circulating, and it was a sight! Everything wrong about it! Now, I say, who put 'em wise?"

No reply came from his stunned auditors. Shelby wiped his moist brow and continued:

"But that isn't all! Have you seen the evening papers?"

"Not yet," Denman feebly answered.

"Well," Shelby went on hotly, "both the *Tribunal* and the *Budget* have long anti-saloon articles—!"

"The *Budget!*" burst from the rest in unison.

"Yes, the *Budget!*" Shelby loudly reiterated. "I've just talked with General Diggin. He's crazy mad! Seems that a week or so ago a New York advertising firm contracted with him for space in his newspaper for a period of two months, without stating what it was for. And he was so blamed anxious for business that he signed the contract. And now it turns out that the space was secured for the 'drys,' and they can run their anti-saloon articles in the *Budget* and right under Diggin's big nose—unless he wants to jump his contract and have a suit on his hands, for the contract carries a penalty clause!"

"Well, I'll be dommed!" broke from the gaping McCarty.

"And that ain't all!" cried Shelby, almost shouting in his excitement and anger. "Miss Hazard has tied up the Opera House and Odd Fellows Hall for a dozen or more 'dry' lectures—"

"She couldn't do it!" exclaimed Denman, getting to his feet. "Brawn and Webster must have known what she wanted the halls for—"

"Well, dumbhead!" Shelby sneered, "do you suppose she rented the halls in her own name? Not much! She's too cunning! They were rented through a Chicago agency! Oh, we're the wise guys, we are! And while we sit around waiting for them to dry up and blow away, they get their petition signed up correctly and filed, and nab the halls and the newspapers right out of our hands! Caroline Hazard is lining up the women! Loring has personally taken charge of their campaign—something's wrong with Taft! And, by G—!"

Just then the door opened, and Charles Smith stalked into the room.

For some moments he stood looking inquiringly about. Embarrassment tied his tongue. Though he knew that the proper interpretation of his rôle justified, even demanded, his presence there, nevertheless he had come to talk with Denman alone, and had not expected to break in upon a political caucus. As for the others, fear of the mayor's wrath because of their preliminary failure held them silent and sullenly on their guard.

Denman was the first to find his voice. It came weak and quavering. "Where have you been all day, Gus? We needed you."

"Yes, Gus," Moller now boldly offered, his courage returning as Smith kept silence.

The latter took a vacant chair and drew it apart from the others. He still feared propinquity. Then he sat slowly down. "The women are coming to see us to-night," he said quixotically, not knowing how else to hide his uneasiness.

The abrupt announcement was a mental bomb that drove every head upward, every mouth wide open, and shot McCarty bolt upright and rigid in his chair.

Smith casually surveyed the field, and then laughed softly. Again his audience stared without comprehending, for August Schmidt was seldom wont to even smile.

Then his face again became grave. "Miss Hazard telephoned," he said. "She wants to get an appropriation for the United Charities."

"And what did you tell her?" whispered Denman, hoarsely.

"Oh, to come, of course, and bring her friends," replied Smith, in a matter-of-fact tone.

An inarticulate exclamation burst from his auditors. Shelby leaned far over the table, his face working with passion. "Good Lord, Gus! This is the monthly financial meeting of the council! We can't have the women there! It would ruin us!"

Smith had not known that, of course, nor had Mulligan so informed him, although the fact that a meeting of the city council, over which he must preside, would fall on that Monday evening had caused him many sleepless hours and much tactful conversation with the slow-witted Mulligan in way of preparation. And now it was dawning upon his severely taxed mind that Miss Hazard had adroitly scored a point through him.

Denman crumpled up with a groan. "Boys," he gasped, "here's where we meet our Waterloo!"

"But," cried Moller, "we can rush the appropriation through for them first; then they'll go home!"

Denman shook his head helplessly. "Miss Hazard's wise to that," he objected. "No, they are coming to the meeting to secure data to enable them later to sweep every last one of us out of power. And, unless we can keep them away—" He hesitated and looked searchingly about at his companions.

Then he brightened somewhat. "I'll tell you what we'll do," he said, turning to "Clack" Harris and speaking rapidly. "You telephone to Miss Hazard and say that the regular council meeting is postponed, owing to the mayor's illness, but that it isn't going to interfere at all with the pleasant little surprise that the aldermen had planned for

the ladies—that every one of 'em who attended the meeting was to receive a complimentary ticket to the 'movies' tonight, but that they shall have them anyway. Then you buy fifty or seventy-five tickets to the Oriental theater and take 'em up to her right away, with the compliments of the council."

Harris grinned. Pranks of this sort delighted him beyond measure. And he was, moreover, flattered by the confidence which such an astute politician as Royal Denman saw fit to repose in him.

"Now you, Gus," Denman resumed, "go home and to bed. Call Dr. Voss and let him into the secret. We'll have the boys gather at the city hall about ten or half-past; and then they can suddenly hold the meeting, approve the month's bills, and clean up everything, while the dear ladies are enjoying the 'movies' in blissful ignorance. Then next month we'll be ready for 'em! What d'ye say?"

"The idea's corking!" exclaimed the admiring Harris, rising and kicking back his chair. "I'll get the tickets right now and go up and see the dear Caroline before supper!" With which he started away, first, however, stopping to name his terms. "I'll get one hundred five-cent tickets," he said. "But my bill to the council will be ten dollars, see?"

Denman nodded his acquiescence, and the young man departed joyfully upon his errand.

Through all this Smith had sat in silent wonder, conscious that he had ignorantly created a crisis, but wholly unaware of its magnitude and import to Filbert's myrmidons of alcohol.

Denman now turned to instruct Supervisor Lawver and "Boss" Moller. "You, James," he said, "get out and circulate among the boys. See 'em all and put 'em wise to what we're up to. And, John, you and McCarty better go with him. Get 'em rounded up before supper."

He turned to Smith. "As for you, Gus," he began, in an altered voice, "I think—"

"I'd like to see you alone for a few minutes," Smith quietly interposed.

Denman's brows went up slightly; but he nodded dis-

missal to his political lieutenants, and then sat back expectantly.

"I want to discuss the Vaughn case." Smith, without preamble, plunged into his errand.

An expression of utter astonishment came into Denman's chalky face. He swallowed hard, and stared across the table blankly at Smith.

"And we'll look into it right now." There was ominous coldness in Smith's tone.

"But, Gus—why? The campaign is on! Leave that until—"

Smith interrupted with a curt laugh. "If the 'drys' win, my brewery will not be worth half its present value," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"But, in that case, *you* won't lose!" cried Denman, exasperated beyond the point of caution.

"I thought not," returned Smith quickly. "Now just who will?"

"Why, Schwartz."

"The Vaughn estate, you mean?" Smith suggested.

"Well—look here, Gus, I thought that was all settled long ago! Why do you want to open it again? Schwartz squeezed old Vaughn out, as you know, and sold you the stock, which you hold under mortgage. But Schwartz isn't going to foreclose on it. And if you have to sell the brewery at a sacrifice, he is the loser, not you."

"That is," Smith amended dryly, "Molly Vaughn is the loser."

Denman glowered darkly, but did not reply. Smith sat for some time, busily revolving the meager data culled from Mulligan and from the papers and documents which he had taken from Schmidt's box at the bank. He would have given much to have been able to talk freely with Denman, to voice the questions agitating his thought, and to probe to the bottom the baffling mystery that seemed to surround the unfortunate Molly Vaughn. But his lips were sealed. And yet, he might, with proper tact and skill, secure much from the woman herself. Indeed, she and the stupid Mulligan had thus far constituted the only field that he could with any degree of safety cultivate.

Then a daring suggestion came to him. He hesitated not, but voiced it immediately. "I want," said he, trying to speak without agitation, "a summary of the whole Vaughn affair—my part in it, and Schwartz'. Have it ready for me this week. I—I haven't been over it for so long," he added, as an afterthought, "that I have forgotten a lot of the details."

Denman pushed back his chair and stared at him. "You're crazy!" he muttered.

Smith rose and came around to where the amazed lawyer sat. "I may be," he said, in a tone of deep significance. "But I am going to know where I stand before this campaign goes any further. And if I am not likely to lose anything by a 'dry' victory, I may—for the boy's sake—"

Denman, unable longer to restrain himself, burst out with an imprecation. Smith's hands itched to get at the lawyer's throat, but he controlled himself.

"I have always thought," he commented, with a sneer curving his lips, "that the Bertillon system ought to be applied to lawyers as well as to crooks. You fellows and the doctors would all be 'mugged,' if I had my way!"

He left the dazed attorney and went to the door. "Have that statement ready for me this week," he repeated, fixing Denman with a cold look. "Then I'll decide what action I'll take against the 'drys'."

CHAPTER 14

SMITH left the presence of Royal Denman, believing that he had tricked the crafty lawyer into two important disclosures, namely, that August Schmidt's property had been wrested from Molly Vaughn's father in some questionable affair of business, and that Denman was implicated in the transaction. Moreover, he was now thoroughly convinced that the lawyer was a rascal and craven.

As he proceeded meditatively up the street he heard the town clock strike five. At the same moment he almost collided with Molly Vaughn and little Karl, emerging from an

adjacent grocery. He stopped to salute them and apologize for his carelessness; but his words were checked by the boy, who, with a shout, rushed into his arms. Smith caught him up—and then set him quickly down again. It had occurred to him that the truculent Schmidt never would have done such a thing! He threw the woman a quick glance. She stood with an enigmatical smile on her face—and Smith would have given worlds to know what it concealed. He turned, still holding the boy's hand, and made as if to accompany them. She did not protest, either by word or gesture. Indeed, Smith thought she seemed to invite him—and he wondered why.

"Been out buying your supper?" he advanced, awkwardly, noting the few small parcels in her arms.

She glanced down at them, and then smiled up into his face. "Yes," she replied. "We are not hearty eaters."

Again he permitted himself to be swept away by the impulse of the moment. "Well, by George!" he ejaculated, "you are going to eat to-night! Do you like steak?"

They were passing a market. Without waiting for her reply, he opened the door and plunged in. When he emerged, a few minutes afterward, she and the child had gone.

Smith uttered an exclamation of impatience and set off hurriedly in the direction of her home. He chose the side streets, to avoid any possible meeting with his political affiliates. When at length he arrived at her door, she was there to open it.

"Well, you gave me the slip!" he exclaimed. "But," laughing good-naturedly and holding out the steak, "you are not going to keep this and me out in the cold, are you? Besides, you told me I might come—often."

She looked steadily and somewhat strangely into his face, then smiled faintly and stepped aside. He quickly entered and divested himself of his overcoat and hat.

"Now," he said, briskly, "I'm going to help get supper—for of course you have invited to me to stay, haven't you?"

"Of course, August," she replied, very gently, "if you wish."

The recurrent thought of Schmidt again threw its shadow across his ebullient spirits. How *had* the fellow conducted himself in her presence? He stared at the woman again in perplexity. But she seemed to impress him now as wishing to place him at his ease. Apparently it concerned her little how he behaved, even when he was most certain that his conduct must be utterly dissimilar to that which Schmidt would have exhibited under like circumstances. Was this woman playing with him? He wondered. The ungenerous thought put him on his guard.

"It is very strange to be setting the table for three," he heard her say. And then he saw that she had gone quietly about her simple preparations. He followed her into the little dining room.

"You do not often have company?" he ventured.

She stopped and glanced quickly at him. He thought her cheeks flushed faintly. "No," she answered, resuming her work. "Karl and I are always alone."

Karl? Yes, that was the child's name. And Smith was somehow glad he did not bear his father's appellative. But —again the thought fell crashing upon him—that boy was supposed to be *his!* Good heavens! what a brazen wretch she must consider him, to thus enter her home and further pollute it with his unwelcome presence. He began to wish that he had not come—to wish that he had not so insistently sought the society of this woman whom he was believed to have so basely wronged! And yet—perplexing thought! —if Schmidt really had so wronged her, how to account for her present treatment of himself?

He shook his head in hopeless confusion. He was not the master of his fate. And he inwardly prayed that the sudden impulses which he so invariably obeyed might always flow from a source far, far removed from the roiled springs of human thought.

"Go into the sitting room, August, and play with Karl." He looked up from his meditations and met her smile. "I will call you when supper is ready."

He turned at once and followed the happy child. Seating himself by the little table, he drew the boy upon his

lap, and then launched out into the most marvelous imaginative tale that he could construct. The little fellow nestled against his shoulder and scarcely breathed as he listened. Smith's fertile imagination yielded its most abundant riches. Soon he was lost, with the boy, in the mazes of his own fascinating story. He felt the little arm about his neck tighten when the giant dashed down upon the fleet Jack, or the earth opened and the genii roared forth; and with the tightening of that little arm came a clutch at Smith's own empty heart. Ah, if he could but claim this child! If he—!

Again in the shadows he saw with glittering eyes the sordid raff crowding to his bar. He saw the laborer, Rimes, robbed of his wages and poisoned by the vile drug sold him under governmental protection, stagger off with the burden of sorrow and misery for which he had exchanged his silver. He saw the drunken, leering, foul-mouthed wretches rushing up at his invitation; he heard the ribald songs of the fallen women; he touched again the dirty, diseased bodies that rubbed against him—!

His voice failed, and he shrank back into his chair, staring at his hands. They had robbed and debauched, those hands! And now they were fondling the tiny ones of this innocent babe! He looked up, with a start. Molly Vaughn stood before him—and he thought there were tears in her eyes.

"It is ready," she said, simply. Without speaking, he rose and followed her, with his brain awhirl.

At the table Smith caught himself studying the woman often. Though the fare was meager, the linen patched, and the silver plated and worn, yet he thought she presided over it all with the grace of a queen. Two kitchen lamps afforded a fitful light; but she did not apologize for their sallow glow, nor did she refer to a single detail of her lowly environment. He watched her narrowly for anything to indicate that Schmidt had been a frequent diner at that same table, but his scrutiny yielded him nothing. And yet, there was nothing in her loving attention to little Karl and her hearty coöperation with Smith in framing replies to the

child's insistent questions about the heroes of fairy lore, to disprove his recurrent assumption that she considered him Karl's father. Withal, she was wholly at her ease. She talked freely, but on conventional topics; and at times she even became vivacious, despite her circumstances which, Smith felt, she must find distressing in the extreme. His admiration for her grew with every moment.

But toward the end of the meal she seemed to grow quieter. At length, after a long interval of silence, during which Smith mentally commented upon the lingering traces of what once must have been rare beauty, she looked up and said, in a low tone: "August, the money which you left for Karl is not all spent. I was going to buy him a little suit, but now—"

"Oh, yes," he interrupted, his interest quickened. "Well, you know I intend to keep that purse full."

Her dark eyes seemed to wander in questing fashion over his face, as she slowly shook her head. "No, August." Her voice trembled just a little. "It is—stained."

He stared at her in perplexity. "I—I don't understand," he stammered.

She sat for a moment hesitant, peering into her cup. Then she looked up, slowly.

"I went over to see poor Mrs. Rimes this morning. Perhaps you did not know that her husband nearly killed her last night."

"Rimes? Why, how is that?" interrogated Smith. Then a look of comprehension crossed his face, and he quickly averted his eyes.

"He came home," she went on, quietly, "after he had been in your saloon. He said he had been robbed by you. And then he struck her. The doctor said—"

Smith had half risen from his chair. His heart was pounding violently. He attempted to speak in his own defense, but under her steady gaze he stammered, faltered, and ceased. Then he sank back, consuming with shame.

"If you wish to return the money," she resumed, "I will take it to her."

Smith found his voice with an effort, and it came low and quavering. "She—lives—near—?"

"Yes. Back on Willow Street."

"And—children?" He hoped for a negative reply.

"Three little ones."

August Schmidt would have known these facts; but Charles Smith's thought was now too occupied to consider that. He drew out his purse and emptied it upon the table. "I don't know how much there is there," he said, in a husky voice. "But—take it to her."

"I will see her to-night," she answered, gently. "Will you go with me?"

He looked up, but would not meet her eyes. "No—I—I cannot," he faltered.

"Oh," she made quick reply, "I forgot—the council meeting."

"I shall not go to the meeting to-night," he said, shortly. "I am—supposed to be sick."

"Supposed?" she queried, with a faint little smile.

"One of Denman's tricks, I guess, to fool the women." And again his head sank.

A light gleamed in her eyes. "To deceive Miss Hazard, you mean?" she suggested quickly.

He nodded. And then, without further preamble, he briefly outlined Denman's ruse. The woman sat looking at him throughout the recital, but with unseeing eyes. And when he concluded, the meal ended in silence.

As they arose from the table she came to him. "August," she said, wistfully, "will you do something for—for poor Mrs. Rimes and—"

He interrupted her with pathetic eagerness. "Yes! And for you!"

"Then go to the council meeting to-night."

He looked down into her upturned face, and for a moment they stood thus, with eyes interrogating each other. Then he reached out and took her hand, with a strange, shy reverence. "I would do anything for *you*," he whispered.

She gently disengaged her hand and turned away. "You must go now," she said, her voice tender with sympathetic understanding. "You and I have much to do."

"I am sorry for Mrs. Rimes—" His throat filled. "But you will let me bring you—"

"No, August. I cannot use money that has bought liquor."

"But," he pleaded, following her and holding out his hands in appeal, "I have money that did not buy liquor! Will you take it?"

She turned and looked at him. Her eyes were moist. "You may buy anything for her, or for Karl, with *clean* money," she answered.

And when Charles Smith went out again into the frosty, moonlit night, he was glad that the "dry" petition had been filed that day.

* * * * * *

At nine o'clock that same night Molly Vaughn let herself into her little house and closed the door with a sob of relief.

At nine-twenty Charles Smith stalked into the council chamber, looking neither to the right nor the left, and went directly to the mayor's desk, where, with a nervous rapping of the gavel, he called the surprised aldermen to order. The thrill of authority which he experienced as he did so was delightful.

At nine-thirty, just as City Clerk Mulligan had gotten his droning report of the questionable proceedings of the last meeting well under way, the doors swung wide, and Miss Caroline Hazard marched into the council chamber, followed by fifty of the most prominent members of the Filbert Woman's Club.

The report slipped from the blundering Mulligan's thick fingers, and his husky voice died away like the failing of a summer wind. A murmur of surprise rose from the disconcerted aldermen. McCarty, in the excitement of the moment, strove desperately to wrest his huge bulk from the grip of his chair. City Attorney Shelby sprang to the mayor's side.

"Don't recognize them, Gus!" he whispered, hoarsely. "And don't let any of the regular business come up! Start a talk about general matters, and keep going until they get tired and leave!"

Like the sudden bursting of the sun from behind dark clouds came to Smith a full comprehension of the whole

affair. His eyes glittered with a new light; his courage soared; and his admiration for the outcast woman with whom he had supped that evening increased beyond bounds. With the vision of Molly Vaughn and her child sustaining him, he put out an arm and boldly pushed Shelby aside. Then his innate sense of courtesy asserted itself, sweeping *Robert's Rules* quite out of his mind. He rose and bowed to the animated group of femininity fluttering at the railing just beyond the aldermen's seats. Miss Hazard, keenly alert for any encouraging sign, instantly accepted the mayor's action as a cue.

"Your Honor," she began, quickly, "and gentlemen of the council, we who have been your guests this evening at the theater—"

By this time Alderman McCarty had wormed himself loose from his chair and was on his ample feet. "Y'r Honor," he bawled, "th' clerk was readin' th' proceedin's!"

"The lady has the floor, sir!" returned Smith, bringing his gavel down hard upon his desk.

"But, Y'r Honor, th' hour is late, an'—"

Again the gavel crashed down. "You are out of order, sir!" cried Smith, his brow wrinkled into a threatening scowl and his eyes flashing fire at the dazed McCarty. "The lady may proceed," he continued more calmly, not quite certain that this was Miss Hazard, and not wishing to commit a *faux pas* by addressing her thus.

"We wish to thank you," resumed Miss Hazard, sweetly, as McCarty, scarlet with anger, dropped back into his chair, "for your bountiful hospitality, and to say that we know of no more appropriate manner of expressing our appreciation than by attending this meeting of the council and taking an interest, too long deferred by the women of Filbert, in the vital matters which doubtless will come before you for adjustment to-night."

It was mildly voiced, and accompanied by the blandest of smiles and most deferential of attitudes. Smith mentally pronounced it a masterpiece. He would have liked to applaud. Instead, he bowed his acknowledgment, as the young woman stepped back from the railing, and then

addressed the gaping council. "The business of the meeting will proceed. Continue, Mr. Clerk."

Again Shelby was on his feet. "Your Honor," he cried, "before we proceed, let me explain that the ladies of the Filbert Woman's Club are desirous of an appropriation by the council for the United Charities, which doubtless accounts for their welcome presence with us this evening. I believe we may assure them that their wishes will be met; and so, in order not to keep them waiting, I suggest that the clerk suspend the reading of his report until this appropriation has been agreed upon by the council."

Smith heard him through with ominous calm. Then, coldly: "That is not in order, Mr. Shelby. We will listen to the report first."

Shelby's jaw dropped, and he stood with eyes staring incredulously at the mayor. Why, August Schmidt had broken every rule of parliamentary practice a thousand times! Was he now insane?

" 'Tain't right to kape th' ladies waitin'," came audibly from McCarty.

Shelby's tongue thawed, but he employed it guardedly. "But, Your Honor," he suggested, choosing his words carefully, "may we not assure the ladies that their wishes will be fully met by us, in order that they may not be detained—"

"Oh," called Miss Hazard from the railing, "we shall be very glad to stay, Your Honor!"

Shelby threw her a venomous glance. Then he appealed again to the mayor. "Your Honor, there are certain legal aspects connected with the reading of the report which should be carefully—"

The gavel again fell with a crash. "The clerk will proceed with the reading!" commanded Smith, now throwing caution to the winds, and determined to dominate the situation at all hazards.

Shelby stood mute, his face flaming. McCarty and two other aldermen leaped to the floor and demanded to be heard. In the resulting confusion, Shelby stooped and quickly recovered the report which Mulligan had dropped, then started for the exit. Smith saw the action, and sprang in front of him.

"I'll take that!" he said, blocking the way and extending a hand.

Shelby attempted to override him. Smith gave ground until his back was against the wall. His thought worked with desperate rapidity. The dramatic scene in Taft's office on the night of his arrival in Filbert flashed before him. Acting on the suggestion, he quickly thrust his hand beneath his coat and into his rear pocket. Shelby caught the movement, and stopped short in his tracks.

"I'll take that report," Smith repeated, in the same low tone.

Shelby paled, but yielded it without further protest. It had all been done in a moment's time, but, as Smith stood again at his desk, rapping for order, he reflected that the incident had revealed certain facts which months of study might not have disclosed.

Again the bewildered clerk took up the reading of the report, and this time carried it through with no other interruption than the little gasps of amazement or incredulity which came from the astonished women as the nature of the proceedings dawned upon them. Smith, elated by his success, pushed on to the business in hand, after the report had been hurriedly accepted by the now thoroughly alarmed aldermen.

At that moment Royal Denman arrived on the scene. He had been hurriedly summoned to meet the crisis, and his advent was welcomed by a sigh of relief from the perspiring City Fathers, who had sat paralyzed by the unexampled conduct of their formerly dependable mayor. Denman at once addressed the Chair, announcing himself the bearer of intelligence of the most vital character.

Smith hesitated. He knew he was depending on this man for light on the perplexing condition of August Schmidt's affairs, and could not afford at this juncture to alienate him. And so, very reluctantly, he recognized him; whereupon the suave lawyer launched a discourse, as intricate as irrelevant, which, Smith knew, would prove quite as capable of indefinite extension as the legend of the locusts and the corn, and delivered for the sole purpose of exhausting the women and effecting their departure.

During the first half hour of the rambling discourse which ensued, while Denman's one-keyed voice droned throughout the room, and many of the aldermen nodded and dozed, Smith sat poring over the month's bills which he had secured from Shelby. Why had the council been so alarmed at the prospect of their being read before the women?—especially as the report would appear in the local newspapers the following day. Certainly they looked innocent enough to him.

He glanced up, and recognized Dr. Loring, down at the rear of the room, in earnest conversation with Miss Hazard. He deliberated again the advisability of checking Denman's flow of logomachy, but felt anew the leash by which that cunning worlding held him. Still, he was becoming intolerably weary. In his perplexity an expedient suggested to him. He rose and went to Denman.

"Keep going," he said, in an undertone. "They're getting tired. I'm going to take Mulligan with me to the record vault for a few minutes."

Denman looked into his face with an obnoxious stare, but without missing a syllable. Smith beckoned to the clerk, and passed down between the rows of desks where sat the somnolent councilmen, and out into the little room at the right.

Loring turned his head as Smith approached, and appeared to be deeply engrossed with Miss Hazard. But the latter had lost interest in the doctor's remarks. Instead, her eyes followed Smith eagerly.

"What's in that room?" she demanded, abruptly, pointing to the door through which Mulligan had shuffled after the mayor. Then, without waiting for a reply, she started after him. "Wait for me here, Doctor," she called back. "If you hear my voice, come immediately."

The town clock in the tower of the adjacent court house was loudly proclaiming the hour of twelve when she returned. Denman was still dwelling on the subject of civic righteousness, with no indication of having penetrated beyond the introduction. Behind him sat Shelby, now and then proffering points whose absolute dryness was calcu-

lated to produce the maximum of *ennui*. Beyond the railing the women still lingered, listening to Denman's monotonous drawl and heartily wishing themselves quit of the adventure.

"I was just about to start in search of you—" began the doctor.

Miss Hazard silenced him with a gesture of caution, and beckoned him to follow her out into the corridor.

"I have been with the mayor and city clerk for an hour!" she whispered excitedly, when they were alone. "Mr. Schmidt couldn't refuse to discuss the bills with me, although he seemed to know very little about them—whether it was pretense or not, I can't say. But from his constant questions directed to Mr. Mulligan I gathered the information I sought. Doctor, an awful revelation has been made to me! No wonder they tried to keep the women away to-night! Every one of these ten aldermen is an independent purchasing committee, accountable to no one but himself, and invested with full authority to purchase what he desires and charge it to the city! And there is no one to hinder or question him!"

Loring stared at her blankly. She caught her breath and went on.

"You will not gather this from the council reports printed in the newspapers—indeed, Doctor, I don't suppose you ever bother to read them, do you?"

He shook his head slowly. "No," he said, in a chastened voice, "nobody does. We have been too selfishly busy to give any attention to civic affairs, you know."

"But our eyes are being opened, Doctor! And when you read in to-morrow night's papers the innocent announcement that two or three of our aldermen have gone to the city 'to purchase hose,' just know that you will have to pay your proportionate share of their expenditures for liquor, dinners, and theaters, and for the things they will buy for themselves and their families and friends. And they will not buy a foot of hose for the Fire Department—no, nor an inch!"

For some time they continued their low-voiced conversation; then Miss Hazard announced:

"I am going home now. I've had enough. And, mark me, Doctor, our attendance here to-night will result in sweeping Mayor Schmidt and his crew of pirates out of office at the next city election!"

A few minutes later, with many yawns and manifestations of weariness, the women filed slowly out of the council chamber and bent their heavy steps homeward. When the doors closed upon them, Denman fell into a chair and mopped his dripping brow. Shelby strode over to Smith, who some time before had returned to his place, and angrily demanded an explanation. Smith laughed in his face. "You poor fool!" he cried. "I *had* to do it—I couldn't play sick! We had to meet, or expose everything! You stood to queer the whole deal!"

"But where was ye jist now f'r an hour back?" demanded McCarty, crowding up menacingly.

"Why, convincing that woman that black is white!" cried Smith.

"He's right, Shelby," put in Denman, who had been regarding Smith curiously during the explanation. "It was a good bluff on his part, eh? You saved the situation, all right, Gus!"

McCarty swelled up and extended a hand to the mayor. "Ye done jist right, ol' man!" he exclaimed. "Dommed if ye didn't! Ye air a clever lad, Gus, an' it's me what's sayin' it!"

Whereupon Smith, trying vainly to keep his eyes from the incomprehensible features of Royal Denman, assumed the chair and, with brain throbbing, called the meeting again to order. The room was by now free of visitors, and so the monthly bills, regular and otherwise, were ordered paid without the banality of discussion.

CHAPTER 15

THE filing of the "dry" petition shocked the liquor interests into a keener realization of the magnitude of the struggle now awaiting them. The suggestion that Filbert, widely known as the most immoral town in the state, could ever rise—or even *wish* to rise—to such a degree of civic righteousness as to close its saloons, had never for a moment been entertained by more than a scant handful of its complaisant citizens. And that insignificant minority, consisting largely of the lukewarm clergy and a few eccentric "prohibitionists"—"sub-caliber radicals," Denman had dubbed them—had never before been regarded as worthy of serious notice. Filbert was "tough," as the youth delighted to say. And its "toughness" was regarded, not as a blemish, but as an indication of virility.

But now, as if by magic, a thousand male signatures had been placed upon the "dry" petition. Surely this was indication sufficient that the leaven of civic righteousness had long been at work in Filbert's shrunken soul, and that a considerable amount of serious thinking had been done by others than Taft and Loring and the co-workers with Caroline Hazard. And Royal Denman, with this petition before him in the office of the county clerk on Tuesday morning, scanned the names with a constantly deepening sense of defeat. With him were representatives of the Liquor Dealers' Association and the Civic League.

"I don't believe there are enough names of legal voters here," he finally offered, with a labored assumption of blandness.

"We are fully prepared to contest that," replied Dr. Loring, calmly.

For a moment Denman lost his self-control. "But how in hell—I mean, how could you get that petition signed up in a day? You couldn't! There's something wrong here!"

"We are ready to go into court with you," returned Loring.

Denman did not reply at once. He was not so sure that his own selfish interests would be best served by such a procedure. And as for having the petition thrown out on a technicality, his legal acumen had already pronounced against such a possibility.

"We'll see," he finally announced, with the semblance of a sneer. "We will call on each person whose name appears here and ascertain if the signature is valid. Until then, I suggest, gentlemen," turning to his clients, "that we leave the question in abeyance."

And later, when pondering the situation alone in his office, he commended his own wisdom in advising against a contest. "For," he reflected, "while we might win the judge over to our side, I probably can make more money by allowing the question to come before the voters—particularly if the 'drys' win, for then Schmidt will refuse to close the saloons; there will be prosecutions because of the illegal sale of liquor; and I shall be retained to defend the saloonkeepers. Either way, I am bound to win."

He leaned back and gazed long and thoughtfully at the ceiling. Then he bent again over his desk, his brow contracted and his eyes narrowed.

"I want to whip Taft and Loring!" he exclaimed aloud. "After that, the Vaughn business! No, we've *got* to keep Filbert 'wet' for at least another year. Once these things are settled, the town may dry up till it cakes! But—"

There came a lowering shadow over his face. "There's something awfully wrong with Schmidt!" he muttered between his teeth. "And I don't know what it is. But for his physical appearance, I'd say he'd been metamorphosed. *Is* this Schmidt—or *isn't* it? If not, then where did this impostor come from?—and what became of Gus? Eh?—Loring? But, whatever happened, it was on that Sunday night. Mulligan, the fool, might have discovered something, if he'd had an ounce of brains! Schwartz says Loring doped Gus. Looks plausible, but we can't prove it. But—if Schmidt is dead, his property goes to Greta Schwartz, and—Bah! Impossible!"

He took up some papers from his desk. His face grew

darker as he scanned them. "One thing is certain," he continued, under his breath, "if Gus becomes unreasonable about the Vaughn affair, I'll drag him into court on a charge of insanity. Why, the fellow looked yesterday as if he wanted to kill me!"

He glanced up, as some one gently pushed open the door. "Oh, hello, Burns!" he greeted his hesitant visitor. "Come in. But—why aren't you in uniform to-day? Vacation?"

"Laid off—f'r good," the man replied, sinking into a chair. "Mr. Denman, I've been dismissed fr'm th' force!"

"By whom, Burns?"

"Th' mayor, sir. Over th' heads of th' police commissioners."

* * * * * *

Flushed with their first victories, the anti-saloon forces were now scurrying about for fresh laurels. As the days passed, their organization developed strength and unity. Offices were taken in the Caxton Block, and there each morning the "dry" forces were marshaled and instructed, and there the board of strategy met and laid diurnal plans. The compilation of a complete polling list of the town already was well under way, for, as Miss Hazard had informed Dr. Loring, Filbert was not under the election law, and no registration was required.

"Which reminds me," she one day announced, nodding her head sententiously, "of a little plan that I shall propose to the mayor at the very first opportunity."

And, later: "The way to prove that a thing can be done is to do it, Doctor. And the women are going to prove that Filbert can be made 'dry.' The compilation of this polling list informs us who are 'wet' and who are 'dry.' Our next step will be a complete ward and precinct organization, to keep track of all the voters, distribute our educational literature, and work upon the doubtful ones. By this means, too, we hope to interest the women sufficiently to come out to the polls."

"And vote 'dry,' eh?" The doctor smiled at her enthusiasm. Yet no one realized more keenly than he the necessity of an enthusiasm and a faith almost transcendental,

if the slimy tentacles of liquor were to be loosed from that quivering community. For he knew that against them stood the "gang," thoroughly entrenched, under the subtle leadership of Royal Denman. Upon them already was falling the editorial bombardment of the flamingly eloquent General Diggin. Stolidly opposed to them were the congenital instincts and habits of a population largely Teutonic and Hibernian, and the selfish conservatism of those who at heart were "dry," yet whose penury of soul made them support the liquor traffic in their midst, lest their taxes be appreciably increased. Added to this was the mental inertia and listless apathy of that large element who meant well, but whose sluggish thought would react to nothing short of a cataclysm. Withal, the Civic League and the Woman's Club had assumed a task of gigantic proportions. And Dr. Loring and Roger Taft, looking back upon the distressing events of the week, and concealing the ghastly secret gnawing in their bosoms, clasped hands and resolved to let not even that swerve them from their righteous purpose of arousing the civic consciousness of drug-poisoned Filbert.

"But, Loring," Taft would often say, "I don't know how much longer I can stand it. Sometimes I think I must go mad, when I think of that empty tomb, and—"

"There, Roger," and the doctor would put his arm affectionately about his sorrowing friend, "if it comes to light I will take all the blame. Smith has stood so far. He has everything to gain. Let us trust, Roger, let us trust."

As for Charles Smith, though he had very successfully played the rôle of mayor to a variety of audiences, he was nevertheless far from curling down in the comfortable lap of Fortune. Instead, he was facing another crisis, and this one arising from within. For several days following the monthly meeting of the council he had devoted himself to a close investigation of August Schmidt's affairs, studying the business of his brewery and saloons, and acquainting himself with every detail of their conduct. He carefully checked the business transacted during his week of supposed

illness and erratic convalescence, and mentally congratulated himself on the loyalty of Schmidt's employes. Nor was he remiss in invoking blessings upon the head of the defunct mayor for developing a character so repellant, for behind the assumed mask of that character Smith was enabled to labor unmolested, almost unobserved.

And yet his labors yielded him no peace of mind. These days seemed to him fraught with ominous calm, the lull of breathless anticipation. He had seen Denman for brief intervals several times since Monday night, but always in company with one or more of his political associates. The liquor forces were watching the enemy and quietly organizing along lines similar to those followed by Miss Hazard and the Civic League. The mayor's active leadership was not yet in demand; but who could prophesy when it might be?

He had not seen Miss Greta nor Molly Vaughn during these days of portentous quiet, although he had thought it politic to call the former by telephone and explain that he was preoccupied with his neglected affairs. The pique which that young woman had been cherishing since Sunday was not in the least diminished by this act; but Smith needed time and was playing for it against all hazards. For, as we have indicated, something was stirring within him, and his aims of the past few days seemed to be in process of reformation.

In short, he was wondering just where he stood. The lure of a fortune based on the debauching of human life had visibly dimmed since the wife of John Rimes fell beneath the vicious blows of her drink-crazed husband. It faded quite when his thoughts turned to Molly Vaughn and the fair-haired boy. But it shone again with something of its former lustre when he reviewed his colorless past, with its grinding struggle for a bare livelihood, and faced a return to that cheap counterfeit of real life. No; he would compromise, if possible, but he could not yield all—not yet.

For drink itself, Smith had cared nothing; but he had always stolidly refused to surrender the *right* to drink. To his way of thinking, prohibition was an insult to manhood.

"America must be kept the land of the free!" he would loudly declaim, quite oblivious to the fact that the shouting of this beautiful platitude from the house-tops and public squares had not prevented the saloon from binding its heavy chains upon a somnolent people.

"I must study the question," he reflected. And the compromising conclusion yielded him a grain of comfort. "I must remain 'wet' for business reasons—it's my bread and butter now. But I will lean toward reform. I'll begin to work for regulation of the liquor traffic. And, once we defeat the 'drys,' I'll clean up the town. Prohibition doesn't prohibit, anyway. But I always did favor a *reasonable* amount of regulation."

But, even as he reflected, his face flushed when he thought of John Rimes. And when the galling realization stole over him that, despite his gains, he was forever debarred from the society of the respectable, and that henceforth his companions must perforce be saloonkeepers, panderers, and the riff-raff always found where there is the smell of liquor, he hung his head in deep humiliation.

He entered his Main Street saloon with less confidence that day, and began checking up the receipts. But as he worked, a sense of great physical comfort stole over him. The place was light and warm. The aroma from the steaming lunch was delicious. The white-clad bartenders and the colored porter behind the lunch counter were immaculate. Did such as this need "regulation"? After all, the "poor man's club" was not such a chimera. Did our present social system offer anything like an adequate substitute? And was not he, indeed, in a sense, a public benefactor? Possibly, he admitted, the saloon as now constituted—that is, the average saloon—should go; but not until something better were evolved to take its place. And by whom shall that better "something" be devised? By the clergy? The rich? The man of affairs? No, but by the laboring man himself, when he shall have lifted his heavy thought from the mire of ignorance to a contemplation of different things.

And this was his! The Lure now shone forth un-

dimmed, and a thrilling sense of proprietorship again swept over him.

A familiar voice sounded at his elbow, and he turned to meet the quizzical gaze of Dr. Voss.

"Well, and how's the head, August? A beer, please," addressing the solicitous bartender. "*Himmel!* not that one!" he cried, as the bartender took up a glass. "Can't you see the dirt on it, man?"

The bartender apologized and selected another glass.

"You got to be more hygienic, August," said Voss earnestly, wiping his mouth after draining the glass. "I ain't against the saloon by a jug full! But I tell you you got to clean up! The health of the whole community is endangered by you fellows. Look once, I got a case to-day of a fellow who got eczema from your dirty glasses—"

"That's a lie!" cried Smith, losing his self-control and starting toward the doctor.

Voss stepped quickly back and edged toward the door. Smith regained his composure before he reached the startled doctor, and halted. "I ain't myself yet, Doc," he apologized, with a forced smile. "And you must make allowances."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I don't ever remember seeing you any different," he said, bluntly. "You got the disposition of a hyena."

Again Smith had scored a triumph in the enactment of his rôle; and the realization mellowed him. "Come back here with me, Doc," he said, "and tell me about that hygienic stuff."

The doctor unbent and accompanied Smith behind the bar. "Now look," he began in explanation, "here is your copper sink and a dozen glasses on either side. Now how were they washed? Eh, George?" addressing the question to the interested bartender, who stood peering over his shoulder.

"Well," explained the employe, "first thing this morning I filled the sink with cold water—"

"Cold water, you see, August!" interrupted Voss.

"And then, after each customer had had his drink, I soused his glass in the water and stood it along side to drain."

"Well," demanded Smith, turning to Voss, "what's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong! what's wrong!" cried the excitable Teuton, fairly dancing up and down. "*Gott in Himmel,* what's wrong! Look once, here comes Tim Jordan—wait!"

A dirty, bewhiskered creature, whose tattered rags scarcely held together about his trembling form, slouched in through the side door and dragged himself slowly up to the glowing stove, where he stood quaking like an aspen.

"You ain't ever got a square look at Tim, eh?" asked Voss. "No? Then come here once."

He led Smith quickly over to the disintegrating wreck. "Hello, Tim," he called, cheerily. "Show Mr. Schmidt once how much room you got inside your face."

Jordan looked up unsteadily and opened his mouth wide. Smith shifted his glance from the evil countenance to the mouth—and then fell back in horror and stood staring blankly at the slowly consuming wretch.

Voss watched Smith narrowly for a few moments, then took him by the arm and led him back to the bar. "Recognize the disease, eh?" he asked. "I thought you would. Well, seeing that Tim is one of your steadiest customers, how many people in Filbert has he transmitted this unmentionable disease to by means of your dirty glasses, eh? I ain't mad, August—I'm just telling you things what is good for you, eh?"

Smith did not hear. Again the Lure was dimming. Voss studied him guardedly, and waited. Soon another customer entered, and was served his morning toddy. Smith, with glittering eyes, watched the bartender dip the empty glass into cold water and invert it on the drain.

"Well?" queried Voss, when the customer had departed through the side door.

"Well, what of it?" was the churlish reply.

"I happen to know he's got the same disease—"

Smith, with a muttered exclamation, seized the glass from which the man had drunk and shattered it upon the floor.

The crash roused Jordan and feebly stimulated his

poisoned brain. He braced himself painfully and shuffled his battered hulk to the bar. "Whiskey," he croaked, throwing down a dime.

Smith pushed the bartender roughly aside and swept the coin to the floor. "You get out!" he shouted at the stupefied Jordan. "And don't you ever come in here again!"

Jordan swayed back and blinked stupidly. Smith repeated his words.

The hideously repulsive face of the diseased wretch broke into a leer. "Ha, ha!" he gurgled. "Y'r Honor will 'ave 'is li'l joke! An' that th' same as th' Sunday night I seen ye an' Misther Taft a-comin' down th' steps wid a feller drunker nor me a-tween yez, an' ol' Doc Lorin' a-follorin' behin', th' night Y'r Honor got hurted—"

Smith's arm shot suddenly out across the bar, and Jordan collapsed into a sordid heap.

"Throw him into the alley!" Smith commanded his gaping bartenders. "And you, Voss, don't you meddle with my affairs again—!"

He did not finish, but seized his hat and hurried out into the street, lest his unleashed temper wreak itself upon the frightened Voss.

It became more than ever patent to Smith, as he strode rapidly through the crisp air, that he must make a stronger effort to curb these frequent outbursts of passion. True, they constituted the one characteristic, other than physical, in which he most closely resembled the former mayor. But they also were becoming a more decided menace to the successful culmination of his plans. He had to admit now that Voss was right. He had often seen these foully diseased creatures in saloons; he had doubtless drunk from the insufficiently washed glasses which they had contaminated—and he shuddered at the awful thought!

He turned in at his other saloon, a few blocks farther down the street, and went directly into the rear room. Yes, there they were, posted conspicuously, lurid advertisements of remedies for the vile diseases of immoral life. He strode angrily to them and tore them from the walls. Why should such things be posted there? Why, indeed, but that through

his satanic business he was now become the patron of these same foul venereal diseases!

He returned to the barroom and went to the cash-register. At sight of its full content the Lure again brightened. The touch of the grimy bills and the wet, sticky coins rekindled the flame of lust and blasted the tender sprouts of a better resolution. He summoned the bartender, and for some moments discussed with him the requirements of the business.

"It's my idea, Mr. Schmidt," suggested the confidential employe at length, "that the back room ought to be fixed up a bit—made attractive to the young people, you know. I'd like to see you weed out the red-light Molls and get the aristocratic boys and girls in here, them that's got money, y'understand. And it's easy done, too. Just string a lot of festoons about, like an arbor, with colored lights scattered around, and stick plants and palms in the corners, with artificial flowers everywhere, and music and dancing, and such-like. I tell you, Mr. Schmidt, there's nothing like the slow, dreamy music and the colored lights to draw the young ones, like flies to molasses. Say, once a young guy gets in there and begins to spend his coin, why, he'll never quit! You got him for life!"

"What will it cost to fix up?" asked Smith, indifferently. His thought was elsewhere.

"Five hundred will do it easy, Mr. Schmidt. I got some good ideas from Gurk's place, where I worked in New York. Say, these red-light Molls ain't doing you no good, Mr. Schmidt. It's the nice girls, from sixteen to twenty years old, that you want to land. They'll get every kid in town in here in no time. Your profits would burst the banks trying to hold 'em!"

Profits! Smith's lukewarm interest was stimulated by the magic word. Profits! But he must drive hard before night fell! "Go ahead," he said, sharply. "How long will it take?"

"About a week," answered the pleased bartender. "I'll get the carpenters in to-day. And, Mr. Schmidt, you'll find I'm right. The girls are drinking more and more nowadays, and they want a nice, respectable place to drink in."

Smith stared dully at the man. He was beginning to comprehend. Then he turned and went slowly into the rear room. Those filthy advertisements which he had ripped from the walls were still floating before his mental vision.

He sank into a chair, and fell to wondering if he would ever sink into that unnatural state where he could look upon human suffering with the same cruel indifference of other saloonkeepers. Would he in time become like them? Oh, well he knew the type, the low-browed, "gin-head" type, with hearts of adamant, impervious to human anguish, oblivious of love, of life, of beauty, of all but the metallic tinkle of the cash-register, these devourers of human flesh, these drinkers of their brothers' blood—well, indeed, he knew them! And would he become like them?

A sudden revulsion seized him. The penetrating fumes of alcohol sickened him. The thought of the rotting hulks that came to his saloons and left their loathsome diseases there filled him with unspeakable disgust. The saloon did *not* afford the atmosphere in which he belonged! He—!

But he was a fool to yield to maudlin sentimentality! Life was a struggle—none knew better than he!—and if the unfit could not survive, the responsibility was not his. He was an advocate of "personal liberty." No one was obliged to drink. And the saloon had its incontestable place in the present social scheme. But it should be a regulated saloon. And he had already pledged himself to the cause of "reasonable regulation."

He rose and went back to the barroom. "Cut out fixing up the back room," he said, abruptly, to his bartender. "I'll think it over first!"

And then he set out for the city hall, to spend the remainder of the day with Mulligan and the greedy brood of political vultures that nested there.

CHAPTER 16

ENTERING the council rooms, Smith found a number of his political affiliates sitting about, some with their feet perched up on the aldermen's desks, earnestly discussing the campaign. The air was thick with tobacco smoke; the floor was littered with burnt matches, cigar ends, and ashes; and here and there, as he moved among them, a strongly alcoholic breath assailed his nostrils. As he surveyed the scene, he suppressed an exclamation of disgust.

"Just in time, Gus," called Moller, setting out a chair. "Denman's coming any minute now."

The words were scarcely uttered when Denman entered, his sallow features wreathed in an unctuous smile. But when his eyes fell upon Smith, the lawyer halted, and his look abruptly changed. For a brief moment he surveyed the mayor narrowly; then he nodded to the others and took a chair. "Well," he began, in a voice of high complaint, "you'll admit now that the 'drys' have won the first round, I suppose? And, let me tell you, they'll win the next if you don't inject some speed into your work. I see they've got a lecturer slated for Sunday."

"He won't have a quorum!" was Lawver's prophecy, made to the accompaniment of a feeble laugh.

"He will!" the lawyer answered sharply. "It was such over-confidence that lost us the first round—or perhaps it was something worse," he added, with a quick, significant glance in the mayor's direction. "But," with a jerky movement of the shoulders, and turning again to the others, "now to business. We're going to begin with the newspapers. I have a couple of articles here I've drafted as the first reply from our side. I'll read 'em, and then we'll discuss the signature we want to attach. This is for the *Budget*."

He settled back in his chair and read very slowly:

"The important question of local option is one that all real thinkers will admit should not be decided until the most mature consideration

has been accorded every argument for and against. This is not a question to be dealt with hastily, or by emotional methods, and for that reason we appeal to the citizens of Filbert to suspend final judgment until a full, intelligent public discussion may be had. We have no desire to influence opinion erroneously, but merely to have the question thoroughly threshed out before the people. Inasmuch as the question is one of tremendous economic, as well as social, importance, no decision should be reached that cannot be proved to be best and wisest for the general good of Filbert. A considerable amount of experience is now available upon which to base our conclusions. The issue has been wrought out elsewhere, and is no longer an academic one. But we feel the great need of arousing the community to the vast significance of the issue involved, and to appeal to our citizens to analyze the experience of other communities in this respect and apply to local conditions the tests and careful judgment applied elsewhere, in order that we may do only what is wisest and best for the continued prosperity of our beloved city of Filbert."

Smith listened attentively while the lawyer read. The article seemed to him lamentably weak, nor did he fail to pierce the thin veneer and detect the subtle scheme of the liquor interests to prevent voters from pledging their support to the local option cause under the specious plea of consideration. But before he could voice his thoughts, Denman took up the reading of his second article.

"And did Abraham Lincoln really say he was in favor of the saloons?" asked Lawver, referring back to one of Denman's quotations, after the lawyer had concluded his reading.

"He most certainly did!" was Denman's emphatic and deliberately mendacious reply. "Said they stimulated business. And that little quotation, boys, has made thousands of 'wet' votes all over the country."

"Well," observed "Clack" Harris, with a laugh, "if Old Abe is 'wet,' then all I've got to say is that we're moving in unusually swell company for us, eh?"

"That's the idea," returned Denman, quickly. "And that is why we can't afford to be known any longer as the Liquor Dealers' Association, or sign that title to our newspaper articles. When most people hear that title they naturally associate it with—well, with the lower classes of society, and are prejudiced right away. If we're going to win we've got to inject a semblance of decency into our organization and appear just as respectable as the Minis-

terial Association, or the Filbert Chamber of Commerce. And so I suggest that we call ourselves the Public Welfare League."

"Hivins!" guffawed McCarty. "How dommed high-falutin'!"

"You're right, Den," Harris chimed in reassuringly.

"But," remarked Lawver, dryly, "I don't see the difference. We're the same drove of rats, ain't we?"

"Naturally," replied Denman, somewhat impatiently. "But it's the psychological effect that the more respectable name will have on the people that I'm after—just as quoting Abraham Lincoln draws a lot of highbrows and hymn-singers. Can't you see that the mere fact of citizenship makes every property owner of Filbert automatically a member of the Public Welfare League, whether he's 'wet' or 'dry'?"

"Right ye air!" ejaculated McCarty, slapping his knee. "An' ye air a clever lad f'r thinkin' it up, too!"

Smith admired the cunning of the lawyer, but did not voice his sentiment. Denman, after a slight pause, continued slowly:

"Now I want to impress upon you saloonkeepers that you've got to run your saloons from now on as if they were Sunday Schools. Don't let anything of a lawless character occur in them, if you want to defeat the 'drys.' And it might be well, Gus," he added, turning to Smith and eyeing him doubtfully, "if you were to hint around that you are contemplating enforcing the Sunday closing ordinance."

A long silence followed. Then Denman went on:

"The *Tribunal* is on the fence. We'll have to find something that will pull it over to our side. The boycott will do it, I guess, for they are heavily in debt. Diggin got caught, but the Liquor Dealers' Association—now to be known as the Public Welfare League—will bear the costs of any suit that the advertising company may bring against him for breaking his contract, and I'll defend him."

Again Smith with difficulty suppressed an exclamation. Denman glanced momentarily in his direction, then resumed his instructions.

"Diggin is getting out a lot of posters for us, with Abraham Lincoln's picture and the words: 'A Vote For High License Is a Vote For Business Prosperity.' We'll plaster the town with them, 'long about the middle of March. And that reminds me, fellows, never use the expression 'Vote for the saloons.' Always say 'Vote for *high license.*' That catches the business men. And now," looking inquiringly about, "who knows what the women are doing?"

His glance fell again upon Smith. "What does Greta Schwartz say, Gus?" he asked.

"Haven't seen her lately," Smith returned in a sullen growl.

Denman studied him keenly for some moments. "By the way," he asked abruptly, "did she say how Miss Hazard and her crew happened to know that the council was going to meet Monday night? Who put 'em wise?"

He did not wait for a reply, but hurried on. "Well, no harm seems to have been done; and now we are better prepared for 'em. But it's your business, Gus, to keep tab on the Woman's Club through Miss Greta—understand?

"As for the 'dry' lecture Sunday, we'll wait and see how they get their audience. Then we'll imitate 'em. My game is to make them lead, while we follow and trump. I'm going to have a lot of representative citizens up from Plainfield at various times during the campaign to tell the people of Filbert how poor business is down there since Plainfield went 'dry' a year ago. I'll have photographs taken of every empty store, house, and barn in Plainfield, and scatter 'em broadcast in Filbert, just to show what happens to a 'dry' town.

"And, boys," he added, rising, "I want every one of you to keep shaved and washed and well dressed during the campaign. If any of you can't afford a new suit of clothes, the Public Welfare League will buy him one. I want the 'wets' to appear better dressed, and to conduct themselves better in every way, than the 'drys.' You have no idea what an effect that will have. And be courteous and polite to every 'dry' you meet. Speak to the women, pat the cheeks of their babies and say what beautiful children they have,

and how proud they should be to bring them up in law-abiding Filbert, with its churches and schools, and all that sort of gaff. Put it on thick. But keep your heads and tempers, whatever happens. And now, you aldermen, come into the other room with me for a few minutes. I've something to say to you in private."

The mayor and council members rose at once and followed him into the little room. Carefully closing the door, Denman turned and said sharply:

"Our greatest card is to be the loss of revenue to the city in case the 'drys' should win, and the consequent increase in taxation—"

"Which will not necessarily follow," observed Smith, dryly.

"Possibly not," snapped Denman, in irritated surprise. "But we're going to *claim* it, just the same. Filbert is full of misers. Nearly everybody here pinches a dollar until the eagle sweats before letting go of it. Now you boys can win this election if you run the city's expenditures up to a point where bankruptcy stares us in the face if we lose the revenue from the saloon licenses. Do you get me? Call a special meeting at once to consider the financial situation and ways to meet the deficit that would be caused if the 'drys' won. Pass the cemetery fence ordinance. Do anything and everything that will cost money; but do it carefully. I'll direct you—but you will have to do as I say.

"All right," he concluded, with a sharp click of his lean jaw. "Now, John and James, my beloved disciples," nodding to Moller and Lawver, "come with me and we'll try the 'respectability' game on a few of our neutral friends."

Whereupon the trio soon departed, leaving Smith wondering why the canny lawyer had not included him in the invitation.

* * * * * *

As Royal Denman had been forced to admit, the first laurels had been won, handily, by the "drys." And yet through no fault of his. Long before the campaign had been launched the shrewd lawyer had begun his preparations

for defense and counter attack; and if his lieutenants, particularly the mayor, had proved as dependable as he had had reason to expect, it is quite probable that the struggle would have ended at the outset in a failure of the "drys" to file a properly executed petition. Now nothing could keep the question from being submitted to the people at the April election. And so Denman swallowed his chagrin without exhibiting the slightest perturbation, and, with his customary suavity of manner and oily cheerfulness, entered upon the two months' grilling contest to maintain and perpetuate the reign of alcohol in sodden Filbert.

As he now regarded it, the campaign had developed into one of education and gently effected coercion—the education false, as he would have admitted readily enough to those not his opponents; the coercion a function of the cupidity of such men as the Honorable Chester Allen, President of the Teutonic Bank, upon whom Denman had designed to make the first test of his "respectability" theory.

Entering the bank, accompanied by Moller and Lawver, the lawyer made his way, bowing and smirking, back to the president's private office. The latter, sitting alone, rose and extended a tempered greeting to his callers. Denman wasted no time in the application of his test.

"The Public Welfare League, Mr. Allen," he announced, "has just been organized for the purpose of civic betterment and the defense of the inalienable rights of the citizens of Filbert. We want your coöperation—"

The bank president interrupted him gruffly. "Now, gentlemen, I am too busy to take any interest at present in such matters—"

"Do we understand, Mr. Allen, that you are not interested in the protection of your own rights?" the lawyer calmly asked.

"*My* rights, certainly!" retorted Allen, heatedly. "But not the questionable rights of the saloonkeepers! Your Public Welfare League is just another name for the Liquor Dealers' Association!"

"I am sure, Mr. Allen," replied Denman sympathetically, "that you misunderstand—"

"I do nothing of the sort!" cried Allen. "And I want you fellows on both sides to know, once for all, that I am not in this fight in any way! I'm absolutely neutral!"

"But, Mr. Allen—"

"That's enough!" the capitalist interrupted. "I am very busy to-day and can't discuss it further with you. Come in some other time."

Moller and Lawver flamed with suppressed anger, but Denman rose, smiling affably. "Possibly we can talk it over when you have more leisure, Mr. Allen," he said courteously. "Er—Mrs. Allen and the daughter keep well? The weather certainly has been trying."

A few brief comments on irrelevant topics followed, and then the lawyer and his wondering lieutenants bowed themselves out. Stepping to the cashier's window, Denman presented a check. The clerk glanced at it casually, then looked up quickly at the lawyer. "Er—Mr. Forbes, the cashier, is out just now," he stammered. "You—you want —this—now, Mr. Denman?"

"If you please," replied Denman, easily.

"But—Mr. Denman—er—it's for—for twenty-five thousand dollars!"

"I believe that is our correct balance," said Denman, with a pleasant smile.

Bidding the lawyer wait a moment, the astonished clerk hurried with the check to the president's room. A few moments later that gentleman emerged hastily and came to Denman.

"G—go back to my office, Mr. Denman," he said hurriedly, and with trembling voice, while he attempted a feeble smile. "I was so occupied when you called that I really didn't understand—"

The lawyer immediately complied, first bidding Moller and Lawver leave him. Meanwhile, the president hastened to the telephone and called one of the bank directors. "Look here, Bonnell," he announced, excitedly, "the liquor people are taking their deposit away from us! What are we going to do?" And he detailed the interview with Denman.

The answer came back at once: "I'll call up the other directors and ask them. But don't let him get away!"

Ten minutes later Bonnell called back. "What proportion of our business is 'wet'?" he asked.

"Not more than twenty-five per cent," said Allen. "But that isn't the point. If we don't swing with them they will take away their account!"

"But so will the 'drys' if we do!"

"No, for the 'drys' don't hang together like the 'wets'—they are not united like the liquor people!"

"That's so. All right, tell Denman we'll join the Public Welfare League, and you can put my name down, and Cove's, and Wheeler's. Crandall will come in when I explain to him. But don't for your life let Denman take away the account!"

Shortly thereafter Royal Denman emerged from the bank, with just the semblance of a smile curving his thin lips, and sauntered slowly up the street. The test had yielded its first fruits, and they were honey-sweet.

* * * * * *

By Saturday Smith believed himself sufficiently composed to call again on Greta Schwartz, and so he presented himself at her home that evening with far less trepidation than he had experienced the week before. His resources now were more adequate, he reflected, for experience and the unwitting Mulligan had afforded him all the data requisite to meet any ordinary emergency which might arise. Schmidt, he learned, had been wont to call at the Schwartz home semi-weekly; and from the city clerk's suggestive allusions he gathered that these duty-calls were brief and conventional. He was convinced that the mayor's relationship to Miss Greta had been pecuniary, if he might thus express it, and that the contemplated marriage had been arranged on a strictly business basis. Denman had submitted that afternoon the report of the Vaughn transaction which Smith had demanded; and although the latter found it so equivocally worded that he could make little out of it, he felt reasonably certain after perusing it that the marriage was intended to amalgamate the financial holdings

of the two principals and remove the cloud which unquestionably rested upon the titles to their extensive liquor interests.

Smith had not seen Molly Vaughn since Monday evening. He had purposely avoided her, for he had found that under her strange influence his concept of his rôle was not such as to conduce to a realization of his dubious financial plans. To safeguard his title to Schmidt's holdings he must marry Greta Schwartz. The contemplation of failure to do this brought vividly before him the unwelcome prospect of a return to his former colorless, hand-to-mouth existence. The thought of danger attaching to his present position had by this time almost ceased to recur to him. The disappearance of Schmidt's body from the Loring vault was now but an amusing caprice of fortune.

And so, with the Undine dancing sprightly before him, and with the renewed resolve to enact to the full August Schmidt's part of the program, he calmly entered the Schwartz parlor that evening, and was received—somewhat coolly, it is true—by Miss Greta.

He breathed easier when he learned that Herr Schwartz and his wife were spending the evening from home; and he congratulated himself heartily when, following a carefully devised explanation of his past remissness, extending back to the rejected dinner invitation of the preceding Sunday, Miss Greta proffered her forgiveness, and smiled again full-orbed upon him.

"But, August," she observed, in a voice tinctured with apprehension, "you *do* seem different. Is it the head? And what does Dr. Voss say now?"

"Bah! It is nothing," he deprecated. "Most of it is put on, to deceive the 'drys.' I'm following a little scheme of my own," he added, his eyes twinkling sententiously. "And I get so interested that sometimes I forget and act that way before my old friends."

She received the explanation with a laugh. *"Doch, August,"* she said, "what if you were to act like that on March thirtieth?"

"March thirtieth?" he echoed. A strange sensation crept over him.

"Yes, our wedding day. Why, you would embarrass poor Father Achtung worse than you did Sunday." And now that she had accepted Smith's explanation of his erratic conduct on that unhappy day, she threw back her head and laughed heartily.

And it was well she did, for thereby she failed to perceive the look of utter consternation on Smith's face.

But, why not? Was he not intending to marry this woman? And would it not effect the consummation of his plans?

True. And yet—and yet—the proximity of the event—

The Lure was again fading.

"And there is so much to do before that day!" she went on. "First, to whip the 'drys,' and then—" Her smile vanished, and her features hardened. "—to put Molly Vaughn where she belongs!

"But, August," turning abruptly to another topic, and assuming an offended tone, "you didn't kiss me when you came. Is that part of your 'scheme' too?"

He did not venture a reply for some moments. Then he forced a smile, pallid and fleeting. "I—I never was sentimental, you know," he tentatively offered. He felt that nothing could have induced him at that moment to kiss her!

But his words and conduct, refracted through her unusual good-humor of the evening, appeared to her in attractive colors, and she laughed as she contemplated them. *"Nun gut!"* she exclaimed. *"Du bist froelich!"* And she launched into the German tongue in playful banter.

In his embarrassment Smith drew from his pocket Denman's report on the Vaughn affair. Miss Greta saw it, and playfully held out her hand. Smith gave it to her without thinking.

"By the way," she said, tossing the document upon the table, "seeing this paper reminds me of Miss Hazard. She read a long report at the Woman's Club this afternoon. Civic righteousness! *Himmel!* They would confiscate our property, and yet they talk of civic righteousness! But," she added, her eyes snapping, "didn't you fool her at the council meeting Monday night! Papa said that was worth

a million dollars. August, you are smart. *Ach,* if only you hadn't been sick from your accident the 'drys' never would have got their petition signed right! It's too bad!

"But we'll whip 'em anyway!" Her eyes narrowed and her teeth set. "And we'll throw that Hazard woman down so hard—August, have you thought how to get rid of her yet?"

He shook his head vaguely.

"Well, ask Mr. Denman," she suggested in a sharp tone.

He was not thinking then of Denman, but of Molly Vaughn. And he was dully wondering why, if the Vaughn child was his, this woman, so soon to become his wife, tolerated him.

But, yes, it was business only that held him to her. And there was no reason why she should refer to that unfortunate affair or to the child.

"I hate her, as I hate those Vaughns!" exclaimed Miss Greta. "Oh, August, how could you ever let Madeline Vaughn deceive you so?"

Smith was all attention again. At last he was to learn something of the mystery which tormented him so incessantly—

But his expectation was dashed by the entrance of Miss Greta's parents at that moment.

"Mein lieber August!" cried Herr Schwartz, clasping Smith in a clumsy embrace. *"Ach,* but dot Denman vas schmardt! Listen vonce: he goes to Mr. Squill, of der Squill Company, und says: 'Ve vant you to join der Public Velfare League, Mr. Squill,' und Squill says: 'It's der Liquor Dealers' Association, eh? *Nein,* I know you fellers! I don't join.' Und Denman says: 'Mr. Allen, of der Teutonic Bank, he buys der filing cabinets und fixtures und safes und such-like from you, eh? Vell, he iss von of us, und he ain't goin' to buy dese tings from you no more if you don't join us, eh?' *Himmel, August!* dot Squill, he join us quick! Ha! ha!"

Smith stood in awkward silence before him.

"Und Gale, of der Traders Bank," continued Herr Schwartz, with increasing animation, "he didn't sign der 'dry'

petition, but he iss 'dry' yust der same. Vell, Denman goes to him und says: 'You join der Public Velfare League, eh, Mr. Gale?' Gale shakes his head. 'All right,' says Denman. 'But Mr. Squill iss von of us, und he vill bank at der Teutonic Bank now, 'cause Mr. Allen iss a member of der Public Velfare League.' Ha! ha! August, you should of seen Gale sign his name! *Gott in Himmel,* he broke der pencil, he vas so excited!"

Smith smiled grimly. Yes, Denman was cunning—diabolically so. And, reflecting momentarily on the future, the thought afforded him no comfort.

"Come," broke in Miss Greta, with a hopeless look at her father, who had ensconced his ample frame into an armchair for a long conversation, "I have been in the house all day, and want to get out. Take me for a walk, August, *bitte.* You know," she whispered significantly to Smith, as they were preparing to set out, "we have so much to talk over—haven't we?" And Smith, who had not failed to catch the insinuation, pulled the door shut behind them with a savage grunt in lieu of words.

A half hour later, as they were emerging from a confectioner's, Smith suggested that they stroll down past his lower Main Street saloon. "Just to hear how much racket the boys are making," he said, with a heavy effort to be jocular. Truth was, he did not have the courage again to face Mrs. Schwartz and her voluble conversation in the German tongue.

As they were passing the saloon Smith reflected that it was the one which he had been about to enter that fateful Sunday night, when making his way up that same street. What pranks Caprice had played upon him! And it was there that Sunday night that a fallen woman had emerged from the adjoining door and accosted him—

"So, Your Honor, we meet again, in the same place, eh?"

Belle Glover stood before him, her hands on her hips, her head on one side, and her eyes staring defiantly up into his.

"Enjoying the thousand dollars you made off me, eh? Goin' to buy a sealskin for Miss Greta? Humph!"

Smith quickly recovered from the start, and laughed. "What did I tell you about keeping the corners of your mouth up, little one?" he bantered. "Move along, now."

The fallen woman's eyes flashed and her fists clenched. "Haven't told Miss Greta where you was coming from that Sunday night, have you? Fine little stunt you pulled off about an accident, wasn't it? Nice way to keep Miss Greta from knowing you was out of town to see another woman, eh? Didn't think it worth a thousand dollars to keep my mouth shut, did you?"

Miss Greta turned quickly to Smith. He had fallen back, taken completely off his guard, and was staring down at the woman with open mouth.

"Now, Your Honor, let me tell you something else," continued the angry woman. "I know a few more things that would make interesting reading if they was to get into the newspapers. Accident Sunday night! Ha! ha! Good joke! And I'm thinking it'll be worth your while to hand back that thousand just to keep me quiet! Humph!" She stood for a moment, withering him with her scornful looks; then, with a venomous glance at Miss Greta and a contemptuous shrug of her lean shoulders, she brushed past them and hurried up the street.

"August!" gasped Miss Greta, clutching his arm, "it isn't true—it isn't true, is it? *Lieber Gott!*"

Smith gulped and tried to pull himself together. "Of course not!" he exclaimed. "She's playing her profession—drunk!"

But when he left Miss Greta at her door, he knew that his words had failed to reassure her.

CHAPTER 17

SUNDAY dawned fair and cool; but a sudden shifting of the wind to the south about midday drove up a pall of heavy, gray clouds, and when Charles Smith left his cheerless abode for Odd Fellows Hall, to hear the first of the Civic League's anti-saloon lectures, a fine rain had been falling steadily for some hours.

He had taken Miss Greta to early mass that morning, and had thought, as she sat beside him in the taxicab, that she held herself somewhat aloof. Perhaps it was because he was expecting it, after the unpleasant incident of the preceding evening. Or perhaps it was due to the slight headache from which she had said she was suffering. But when they returned, and he asked to be excused from remaining to dinner, alleging the press of deferred business, he thought she accepted his excuses almost too readily. And his wonder was further heightened when she firmly declined to accompany him to the "dry" lecture that afternoon.

At the doorway of the hall Smith was accosted by Alderman McCarty. "It's comin' out I am f'r a whiff of air," the genial Irishman announced, with a broad grin, "f'r th' multitude of 'drys' inside is like th' witherin' blast of a furnace! They've thousands of 'em in there! Where'd they get 'em? ye ask. I've diskivered. Th' women says as how Miss Hazard called up tin women on th' 'phone and asked them each to call tin others, and git them tin times tin to each call up tin more an' ask 'em would they attind th' lecture. Hivins! but they've swarmed down like bees, till there's only standin' room left. But, mind, Y'r Honor, th' 'wets' kin do th' same, eh?"

Smith nodded and entered the hall, with a keener appreciation of Miss Hazard's genius.

The auditorium was already packed, even to the window ledges, and late-comers were beginning to fill the stage. Smith would have liked to sit there himself, but it was too conspicuous for the leader of the opposition, and he dared not accept the audacious invitation which Miss Hazard, smiling mischievously, despatched to him by one of her lieutenants when she saw him standing alone in the rear of the hall. He was presently joined by Supervisor Lawver, who likewise had arrived too late to obtain a seat.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" exclaimed the latter, glancing over the crowded room. "This means work for you and Denman, Gus."

Before Smith could reply, a song rose from the center

of the hall. Instantly the whole house seemed to catch the inspiration, and, while Dr. Loring, Roger Taft, and the speaker of the afternoon were mounting the stage, the room rang with the refrain with which the campaign had been launched in the Taft home the night Smith made his unannounced entrance as leading man in the strange drama with which Filbert was now so engrossed:

"Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Sound the words in triumph, fling them to the sky!
Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Liquor's doom has sounded,
Filbert's g-o-i-n-g dry!"

"Looks bad," was Lawver's low-voiced comment to Smith. "Looks bad. It's up to you and Denman to split that crowd, Gus, or we're lost."

But Smith—and strange enough it seemed to him—did not share his companion's sentiment. He surveyed that great audience with a heightened sense of respectability. The feelings of self-condemnation, of shame, with which, despite the lure of Schmidt's wealth, he always struggled when with the former mayor's associates, did not assail him there, and in their stead was a keen sense of enjoyment in mingling with people whose thoughts and aims were less sordid than those with whom his lot had been so oddly cast.

When the singing subsided, Roger Taft introduced the speaker of the afternoon. The latter, popularly known under the soubriquet of "Oklahoma Whirlwind," plunged so quickly and so vehemently into his subject that the house was instantly swept away with him and held spellbound.

"I come to you people of Filbert," he cried, leaning far out over the footlights and projecting his long arms into the space before him, "and find you struggling with the problem of the age! A four-fold gigantic problem—a problem fraught with the evil that wrecked imperial Rome—an evil that for centuries has been condemned, convicted, denounced by reason, science, morality—an evil that has been outlawed by society, judged worthy of death by council and court—and yet, because of your moral cupidity, lives, with its iron hands clutching your trembling throats and its cav-

ernous belly distended with the life-blood of your sons and daughters! It is a social problem, because you choose to make it such; it is a political problem, because your government chooses to make it such; it is an economic problem, because the Liquor Trust, knowing that by touching your purse strings it touches your soul, shrewdly chooses to make it such. And, oh, you poor, misguided, hypnotized, misled fools!"

Little by little, as Alderman McCarty sat listening—he had returned to the seat which had been held for him—the burly politician's eyes widened and his ample mouth sagged. Little by little his uneasiness increased. A few more talks of this sort, and Filbert, he thought, must dry up and blow away!

The speaker's voice soared in impassioned eloquence. "What have you done?" he cried, sweeping the great audience with his searching glance. "You have secured the law, and then through your ballots have turned its administration over to the liquor interests! The fingers of your politicians have itched for liquor votes; their tongues have wagged only at the dictation of the Liquor Trust! And your merchants and bankers have sanctioned this, lest their sales fall short a yard or two, or their deposits be exceeded by their banking competitors! Shame upon you, that have polluted the stripes and darkened the stars of liberty's emblem!"

He stopped, with his finger pointing straight at the gaping McCarty. The latter fidgeted uneasily in his chair. He glanced about; and the sight of that great body of people listening with such rapt attention to the crumbling of the "wet" ramparts beneath the terrific bombardment exasperated him beyond measure. At length he could stand it no longer. Rising noisily and in great embarrassment from his seat, which was well forward, he raised his umbrella and, holding it aloft over his head, strode pompously down the aisle to the exit. The diversion brought roars of laughter from the house and a brilliant comment from the lecturer.

"An' would yez have me sit there like a mummy an' listen to his dommed insults?" the alderman angrily de-

manded, when Lawver, who had hastened out after him, tried to show him the probable harmful results of his erratic conduct. "Had I a bomb I'd a throwed it at him, I would!"

"Well," sighed Lawver, sensing the uselessness of reasoning with McCarty, "we've got to hunt up Denman and see what he advises. Coming, Gus?"

Smith, suppressing his amusement, shook his head. "I'll see you later," he said, shortly. With which he turned upon his heel and walked briskly off in the drizzling rain.

He had heard enough of the lecture, and now wanted to think. But, above all, he wanted to avoid seeing Denman. Had he but known it, Denman had just as little desire to see him. For the lawyer sat in his office that afternoon in close conference with City Attorney Shelby, and it is certain that, while Denman broached none of his suspicions to the latter, he would have talked less freely had Smith been present.

"It was a master-stroke, getting Allen lined up," Shelby commented happily. "As you say, it will get him into trouble with his church."

Denman nodded sagaciously. "Most victories are won," he observed, "by getting the enemy to fighting among themselves. Everybody in town knows now that Allen signed the membership roll of the Public Welfare League. That will raise an awful row between him and his minister, for Allen is a vestryman in the Episcopal church, you know. A factional fight will follow, and the result will be a big split. My aim is to get the ministers to working actively on the 'dry' side, for that will make the hard-headed business men drop out. They don't want the ministers in the campaign, because they invariably make a mess of things. I'm going to see that they make an *awful* mess, when the time is ripe for it!"

"You certainly are all right, Den!" exclaimed Shelby admiringly.

"Now," continued Denman, the satisfied expression on his chalky features manifesting the pleasure he felt in the compliment, "we will do the same with the doctors. You know they are already divided into two factions, the Filbert

Academy of Medicine and the County Medical Association. So far they've only squabbled over pills and soothing syrup and split fees. I intend to get them to quarreling over whiskey. The result will be a large increase in the membership of the Public Welfare League."

Shelby laughed aloud. "You're a smooth proposition, Den!" he said.

The latter smiled knowingly. Then he leaned over and tapped Shelby's knee. "My trump card, old man, is still to be played. When it falls, mark me, there will be some excitement in the old town. And it's going to fall—some day."

Shelby drew his chair closer. "Explain, Den," he said.

But Denman shook his head. "Not yet," he replied, slowly. "Not yet. But," drawing out his watch, "it's time young Howlett was here. Stay and meet him. He's a mighty likeable boy."

* * * * * *

Meantime, Smith, unmindful of the cold, penetrating rain, wandered aimlessly up the street, revolving in his thought sundry points made by the "dry" lecturer. Arriving at one of his saloons, he paused for a moment to look at the "wet" placard of Abraham Lincoln exposed in the window. "A vote for high license is a vote for business prosperity," he murmured, gazing at the homely features of the martyred president. "Denman's work," he reflected. "Giving us a 'tone of respectability' that we can't produce ourselves. Humph!"

He turned in at the door, then hesitated. For some time he stood with his hand on the knob and his head sunk, thinking deeply. His revery was presently interrupted by the exit of an ill-kempt, staggering figure. He turned and watched the human wreck slink off in the rain. Then he wheeled about and resumed his way up the street.

For some time—he thought it began with the lecturer's opening words—something had been drawing him, and in a direction in which he was not loath to go. And as the distance which separated him from Molly Vaughn's home decreased, there came a recurrence of the sentiments which

he had experienced in the hall that afternoon. These seemed to force a cleavage in his thought: on one side stood Greta Schwartz and the Schmidt fortune; on the other, Molly Vaughn and poverty—and an indefinable something else, that seemed always to dim the brightness of the Lure whenever his thought reverted to the woman and her fate.

At the broken gate he again halted. He did not know that a pair of sharp eyes had seen him from the window. As he stood there hesitant, the door of the house opened, and a shrill little voice called to him:

"Papa!"

Smith flung the gate wide; and in a moment the boy was in his arms.

Molly Vaughn rose to greet him as he entered the forlorn little parlor with the child on his shoulder. "I am glad to see you," she said. And there was that in her quiet manner of speaking which made Smith feel that she voiced the truth.

"I was—just passing," he made slow reply, as he sat down, "and stopped to inquire about—about Mrs. Rimes."

She smiled oddly, he thought, when she told him of the woman's improved condition; and the smile embarrassed him anew. He looked away from her curiously lighted eyes, and his glance fell upon an open Bible on the table.

"Yes," she said, following his look, "I was reading it when you came."

He flushed. Then he summoned levity to cover his confusion. "Why don't you read something up to date?" he asked.

She studied him for a moment before she replied. "I think this book is more 'up to date' than you imagine," she at length returned.

"But it's full of mistakes, isn't it?" he protested.

"It contains more than twenty thousand errors of translation alone," she answered.

Her calm reply quite swept him off his feet. "Well," he exclaimed, "you wouldn't teach your child from text books that were full of errors, would you?"

She laughed lightly; then turned from the topic quite.

"I wish I might have heard the 'dry' lecturer this afternoon," she said, with a faint note of lament in her voice.

"Why didn't you?" he asked. "You'd have seen McCarty make an ass of himself." And he related the incident in detail.

She laughed heartily; and Smith, as he sat before her and felt again that subtle influence which always she seemed to exert upon him, thought her charming. If this fallen woman, with her grace of manner, her recurrent flashes of beauty, and her keen mind, could exchange places with the vindictive and sluggish Greta Schwartz—

But on the face of it that were now impossible!

"But of course, August, Mr. Denman will be able to refute all of the lecturer's points," she observed. "Especially," she added, with a twinkle in her eyes, "now that you have Abraham Lincoln on your side."

"That certainly is a clincher," Smith admitted. "You know, he was in favor of the saloons; said they stimulated business."

She looked up at him quizzically. "If that is so," she said, "we ought to double the number of saloons we have, and so double our prosperity, don't you think so?"

Logical, to be sure. But he hesitated to admit it.

"August," she continued earnestly, "do you know what Abraham Lincoln *really* said about the saloons? No? Then I'll tell you. Father had all of his speeches, and so I can quote from the one made before the Washingtonian Society in Springfield, Illinois."

She rose and went into another room, returning in a few moments with a large volume.

"Listen," she resumed. "Lincoln in this speech said of the saloon: 'Three-fourths of mankind confess orally they are a bad thing, and I believe they all confess it in their hearts.' Now, by garbling that utterance and forging other statements that he never made, the liquor men all over the country have secured hundreds of thousands of votes—do you see, August?"

He took the book from her hand and scanned it closely.

"And he said further, August," she went on, "that if

he ever got a chance to hit the damnable business he would hit it good and hard. But back in 1887 the liquor dealers of Atlanta, Georgia, forged a statement to the contrary and attributed it to Lincoln, and with it tricked the negro voters into voting 'wet.' It was a despicable thing to do, but quite in keeping with their business."

"But," retorted Smith lamely, "he said they should be regulated—"

"He said, August: 'The liquor traffic is a cancer in society, eating out the vitals and threatening destruction, and all attempts to regulate it will not only prove abortive, but will aggravate the evil.' And, again, he said: 'The saloon has proved itself to be the greatest foe, the most blighting curse, of our modern civilization, and this is the reason why I am a practical prohibitionist.' "

Smith sat in embarrassed silence, seeking some colorless thing to say in reply. She looked at him keenly for a moment. Then the sight of his obvious confusion stirred her sympathy.

"August," drawing her chair a little closer and bending toward him, "you are—different since your accident—is it not so? You would like to do better. And—you will let me help you? For I can, you know, oh, so much! And you will need it."

He remained silent, not daring to trust himself to speech.

"It was when you were—the other man, you know, that you made me an outcast—

"There, there," holding up an admonitory hand, as he half rose from his chair in protest, "that is in the past which we are going to forget, you and I. We will learn to live only in the present, will we not? And we will live, not for ourselves, but for those who so much need us—is it not so? In that way only can you make the atonement which I know you want to make."

She paused, and smiled at the little boy who had clambered up into Smith's lap.

"August," she continued, and the smile had given way to an expression of deep seriousness, "your testing time has come; and you will be sorely tried. I know that the great-

est disappointments and severest experiences are in store for you. You will lose all your liquor interests—

"But you will be glad, August, you will be glad!" for he had again by word and gesture sought to express his protest. "And that which will remain will be real, August, *real!*"

Smith now found his belated voice. "You mean," he asked, irritably, "that the 'drys' will win, and confiscate my property?"

"And you think you should be compensated?" she asked.

"Most certainly I do!" he declared, with some heat.

She thought for a moment. Then:

"Yes, the millions of sufferers from the liquor traffic *should* be compensated: not only you, but the poor, wrecked hulks of humanity who have paid you to debauch their manhood; their sad-faced widows; their shame-burdened daughters and the thousands upon thousands who have been murdered by drink-crazed victims—ah, yes, August, they should all be compensated, for their hopes, their happiness, their lives, their very souls have been ruthlessly confiscated by such as you. And where, August, shall their compensation come from?"

"Well," he retorted sullenly, "nobody *has* to drink. It's a free country. Or was, until the 'dry' fanatics tried to take away the personal liberty that the Constitution guarantees us."

"Do you call the permission to wreck one's self, soul and body, personal liberty? Do you call the permission, under governmental protection, to blast the lives of others, to murder happiness, to assassinate the joy of living, to quench hope, and to blot out life itself—do you call that personal liberty? Why, August, such liberty is the lowest form of slavery! We do not allow the drug fiend to secure all the morphine he craves, for we know that he would kill himself with it. But we allow the liquor drinker—the slave of another poison just as deadly—that awful privilege. It would not be so bad if the destruction could be confined to himself, but that is impossible. The drinker of alcohol is himself but one of the pitiable sufferers from his indulgence of a mistaken sense of 'personal liberty'."

"We have rights, guaranteed by the Constitution—"

"The Constitution, August, gives all men liberty of thought and conduct, so long as they obey the laws and do not impinge upon the rights of humanity. Have you the right to sell John Rimes the poison that transforms him into a crazed brute and makes him kill innocent beings who have never done you harm? Are you really proud of a government that affords you such a form of 'personal liberty'?"

"Rimes didn't need to beat his wife," protested Smith, with growing irritation. But the words left him with a sense of shame, under which his face flushed.

"Oh, yes, he did, August," she gently corrected. "Your 'personal liberty' was his driver, and he but a helpless slave."

"But I tell you," he flared out, "that if people let liquor alone it will leave them alone!"

She uttered a little, tired sigh. "You too," she murmured, "mesmerized by that age-old sophistry." Then she gave a little start and threw him a half-frightened glance.

But he sat with averted eyes; and she regained her composure and continued:

"Have I told you, August, of my cousin in France? They found him dead in the weeds beside a low public house in the little village where we lived. His gray-haired mother found him. Oh, yes, she had always let liquor alone—but it blasted her life. I saw it; and all night long the chirp of the crickets and the plaintive call of the night birds rang in my ears and froze my soul. Oh, no, liquor lets no one alone, not even the most innocent. I saw that cousin's child, a wee, sweet girl, under the surgeon's knife because of her father's craving for liquor. I have heard children sobbing at night, and women praying—I have seen brave men hang their heads in shame—innocent, yes, for they had let liquor alone, and yet its foul touch had been laid upon them, and they sank beneath it, degraded, besmirched, impoverished, lost."

Smith clutched the child that lay asleep in his arms. He sat with stiffened shoulders and set lips. He had no

reply—indeed, he remained as if fascinated, waiting with ravenous attention for the sound of her voice through the silence. And again it came, low and tremulous.

"Personal liberty did that, August. And yet no one is able to say just what 'personal liberty' really means. But real liberty is the hand-maid of law. The victim of drugs destroys only himself; the victim of alcohol destroys all within the radius of his thought—but still you demand for him the fullest license under the guise of 'personal liberty.'

"August, you do not really want to destroy human lives, do you? You really found no pleasure in the cruel beating of poor Mrs. Rimes. You don't really like to associate with the diseased patrons of your saloons and brewery. You really do know that alcohol makes moral and social outcasts of all who have anything to do with it, don't you? But your thought is commercialized. You are mesmerized into thinking that your livelihood depends upon alcohol. Or that its sale will bring you comfort, pleasure, luxury. That is only another of its innumerable mesmeric effects upon human thought. But, August, in my isolated life here with little Karl, sewing from sunrise till midnight, year after year, I have learned to acquire a different, a higher concept of supply, just as I have learned a new interpretation of the Bible, despite its mistakes. And now I would not exchange my lowly lot for all the saloons and distilleries in the world! You can learn that too, if you will. August, will you? For, after all, that alone is the *real* solution of the liquor problem."

She had leaned eagerly toward him as she talked, and when she concluded, her hand closed over his.

"August," she breathed softly, "the *real* 'you' is one of God's noblemen—not a betrayer of his brethren for the silver of Judas. The liquor traffic cannot hold that 'you,' nor prevent it from being manifested. Evil's emissary, Royal Denman, has only the power you are willing to give him. And that, if based upon liquor, is only a counterfeit of *real* power."

Smith passed a hand across his brow in confusion. She noted the movement and correctly interpreted it.

"You don't understand, do you, August? It is ignorance that gives to evil the power it seems to have. But you are going to let me teach you, aren't you, August?—now that you have become a new man through your accident," she hastily added.

"August, we don't jeer and laugh at drunken men now as we used to. For now we are learning that drunkenness is a disease—a mental disease. No, *materia medica* can not cure it—and the world is not yet ready to handle disease mentally. But it will be, some day. And so now our sympathy for the drunkard is just as deep and tender as for the sufferer from tuberculosis or racking fever. And our sympathy for you saloonkeepers is no less, for you too are victims of alcoholic mesmerism. And you should be compensated, August, and your compensation for giving up the low traffic in disease and death will come in your own release from its chains. Your freedom from the hellish business of degrading manhood, dethroning womanhood, blasting childhood, rotting bodies, clouding minds, and damning souls will be found abundant compensation in itself. And the compensation is mental, all mental—for even Heaven itself is a state of mind. The saloon is the outward expression of the mentality of the saloonkeeper.

"And now, August," she added, brightly, "I am going to teach you by first asking questions. I shall begin with Royal Denman. What has been his attitude toward you since your accident?"

Self-repression had always been foreign to Smith, yet whenever this woman spoke a spell of dumbness seemed to settle upon him. But now, slowly and with infinite tact, she began to draw from him the information she sought. Smith could not but answer her skillfully worded questions, and yet he did so with a sense of absolute freedom from compulsion. Under the spell of her vivacity of manner, her flashes of wit, and the rapid changes of expression which flitted across her features like the shadows of clouds over sunlit plains, he would have told her his profoundest secrets —though he knew, through it all, that she was dealing with him in perfect candor and with the highest motives that

he had yet seen manifested in Filbert. The child still slept in his arms. The oil in the old kitchen lamp sank low. As she framed her last question, he heard the distant town clock toll the hour of one.

"August, since you admit that it is because of your property alone that you remain in the liquor business, will you tell me if Mr. Denman ever refers to the mortgages on it and to your method of acquiring it?"

"He rendered a report but a day or so ago," answered Smith.

"And would you talk over the report with me, August?" She seemed to hold her breath while waiting for his reply.

"Why, yes—that is, no, I—I—" He remembered that it dealt with the Vaughn estate.

And then it flashed across his mind that he had not seen the report since his call at the Schwartz home. He began to search nervously through his pockets. And as he searched, his face grew red and moist, and he muttered: "I must have left it—"

"Where, August?" she asked, so quickly that it snapped the leash which restrained his thought.

"With her!" he blurted.

She smiled, then rose and gently lifted the child from his arms. "You must go, August," she said, simply.

He seized her hand. But before he could speak she anticipated him.

"I forgive you—all," she said, gently. "But no one must know. Outwardly I must still seem to hate you. But secretly, August, we will work together, to make amends to this little child, and to bring out that real 'you' which the world does not yet know. Go, now—and, oh, August, be on your guard against your one human enemy, Royal Denman!"

When the door closed behind him, Smith walked rapidly to the gate and threw it open, then halted abruptly. The spell was breaking; the old man returning. The Lure, which had died down to a flickering spark, kindled into newness of life. He was a fool! He would return and tell her so, and break with her forever!

He turned and strode back to the door. His hand was already upon the latch.

Then he laughed aloud. He was not such a fool, after all, to play this woman against Greta Schwartz, whom he was to marry in so short a time! Fortune had placed him in possession of the only source from which he might learn the truth of the Vaughn affair. Again he laughed.

And then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he wheeled about and took himself off.

CHAPTER 18

THE first of the "dry" lecturers had been received with a degree of cordiality that surprised even the imperturbable Royal Denman, but early the following morning that undaunted Knight of Alcohol was cheerfully repairing the battered defenses and reinforcing their weak spots. The past week had been one of mixed victories; both sides had scored—and yet he could not deny that the greater gains had been made by the enemy. But, as he pondered the reports of his corps of aids, and particularly that of the deposed Burns on his observations of the preceding evening, he felt that in strengthening his own lines he should begin first with the mayor. And so, when, an hour later, he and Smith sat facing each other on opposite sides of Denman's desk, the latter lost no time in making clear his own thought.

"I have refrained from asking you to participate actively in the campaign, Gus," he began, sitting back in his chair, with his thin fingers pressed together before him and his glittering eyes fixed curiously upon Smith, "in order to allow you time to recover from your accident. But your recovery has been slow and erratic—so very erratic that I want to warn you. Everything you possess is soaked in liquor—of course you know that. And if the 'drys' win, you are going to be hard hit." He paused and waited for his words to penetrate.

"Well, they ain't going to win, are they?" blustered Smith, his truculent manner half real, half assumed.

"Not if you don't 'queer' the deal, Gus," was the calm reply.

Smith flushed. "Why me in particular?" he demanded, bristling.

"Because, Gus, these rumors about you that are floating around now aren't calculated to help our cause any," Denman answered. "And you've got to conduct yourself as you used to before your accident, if you want to keep us all out of trouble. Tim Jordan has been in to see me. If you hadn't thrown him out of your saloon he wouldn't have told me about seeing you and Taft and Loring dragging a man down the stairs that Sunday night. Of course," with a deprecatory wave of his hand, "it's no affair of mine, except as it bears on the campaign. I explained to Jordan that you found the fellow drunk in the hallway and carried him out. But how could I explain your taking Loring's car? And your calling back to Jordan to go home to a family that he doesn't possess?"

Smith sat slowly congealing under the revelation and Denman's incisive questions that followed one another in such rapid succession. And yet he had expected this some time.

"Of course," Denman resumed casually, "I don't particularly care, except in a case like Tislin's, where you made such a complete mess—"

"What do you know about that?" demanded Smith, the battle between fear and anger having left the latter emotion in possession of his mental field.

Denman lifted his brows slightly. "Didn't you expect Burns would come and tell me when you discharged him? Now, Gus, it's up to you to reinstate him right away and square yourself."

Smith shrugged his shoulders. "That's up to the police commissioners," he said.

"But, Gus, you own them, body and soul. And I don't think you wasted any time consulting them when you discharged Burns. Now you put him back at once."

"That I will not!" cried Smith. "He's off the force for good."

The lawyer shook his head. "He has an excellent case, Gus, and if he brings suit against you he'll win. He was merely discharging his duty when he arrested Tislin, and you know it. Perhaps you didn't know that he had already asked me to file the suit and act as his attorney, eh?"

"What?" exclaimed Smith, half rising from his chair.

"And if the case comes to trial, why, all these strange rumors will be thoroughly sifted, you know."

Smith sank back, hot and perspiring. The lawyer studied him closely, and had Smith been in control of his emotions he might have seen just the shadow of a smile lurking about the corners of Denman's mouth.

"You see, Gus, it won't do to antagonize even poor devils like Tim Jordan and Officer Burns. John Rimes is another one; he's been doing a lot of talking, too. And there will be more than talk if you hang around Molly Vaughn any more. Same with Loring; why do you spend so much time with him, when you've always been enemies, eh? And there's that council meeting—what on earth induced you to act as you did then, anyway? Do you think it's going to get you elected to the legislature to have people saying you're mentally unbalanced?"

Smith played for time and self-control by maintaining a sullen silence. Denman's suspicious scrutiny meanwhile slowly changed to puzzled wonder. Then, suddenly:

"Look here, Gus, I have always been a good friend of yours, haven't I? And I don't intend to throw you over now just because you've been acting queer. But you need help, for that accident of yours has put you in bad all round. Tell me," leaning toward him and looking steadily into his eyes, "what really did happen that Sunday night? And what did Taft and Loring have to do with it, eh? Anything that we can use against them in the campaign?"

The situation was become desperate. With the continuance of Smith's obstinate silence, a lowering shadow crept over Denman's face, and into his narrow eyes came the gleam of his former suspicion.

"You are going to be married, I believe," he observed, in a voice of cold irony. "Er—the date is—"

Smith's quick wit seized the opportunity afforded by the apparently irrelevant question. "March thirtieth," he answered.

The unexpected reply went through Denman's system like a current of high voltage, and left him bolt upright and staring. "What—so soon?" he ejaculated. "Why—but I—I had forgotten." He seemed to struggle with his perturbation for some moments, then said: "But you should have waited, Gus."

Smith had himself in hand once more. "Why?" he asked, his curiosity aroused by Denman's genuine agitation.

"For the effect on the people, Gus." Denman's voice was again natural. "Coming so soon, it can't help diverting your thought from the campaign. Postpone it, Gus, by all means. Be advised. You are not yourself yet, and—"

He drew his chair up and leaned well across the table. "Now let me suggest, Gus," he pleaded, in a drawling whine, "you put yourself under the care of Voss and rest up for a few weeks. Then we'll shove you into the campaign hard, just before election, and—why, good Lord, Gus, if you let my plans work out we'll snow 'em under so deep—so deep —why—"

The eagerness of the man excited Smith's risibles and drew from him a low, sarcastic laugh.

Denman stared at him curiously; then his own face broke in a foolish grin. "Now, Gus," he said, with an air of patronage, "put Burns back on the force—on probation, you can say, but leave him there; and then we'll try to quiet these rumors about you. I'll fix Jordan and Rimes myself. As for your marriage, defer it on account of ill health until after election. Plenty of time to marry, you know—"

"You're right," interrupted Smith, with an accent so curious that the lawyer looked up wonderingly. "I *do* need more time to get myself together. I'll go and see Voss this morning."

There was a grain of derision in the odd smile which greeted Denman as he stared into Smith's face and read there the uselessness of further parley. And that smile, far from reassuring the lawyer, served but to confirm sus-

picion and transmute supposition into fact. He changed countenance, but not his dissembling tactics.

"You know, Gus," he said, in a voice that wavered just perceptibly, "I put tremendous faith in you."

Smith nodded, and then took his departure. And when he had gone, Denman sat long, sifting the mayor's words and striving to reach the thought behind them. At length he rose and paced back and forth through the room. "He said nothing about my report on the Vaughn affair," he mused. "I wish I had asked him. But he said enough to prove that—"

He went to the telephone to answer the call that came in just then.

"You, Burns? Yes—Miss Schwartz? On Main Street, you say? All right, Burns. Thank you."

He hurried into his overcoat, seized his hat, and hastened down into the street, where shortly, and in the most casual manner possible, he met Miss Greta emerging from The Emporium and paused to speak with her.

"We are going in the same direction, perhaps? Ah, yes. Then I will offer you my poor company to the end of the block," was his courteous greeting. "Gus has just been with me," he went on, in a voice tender with sympathy. "Poor fellow! Hasn't been the same since his accident, has he? Voss still shakes his head dubiously whenever he mentions him."

Miss Greta from her superior height looked down at the lawyer, and her smile gave place to a curious, quizzical expression. "He has been to you for legal advice, I see," she remarked. "I judged from reading your report that he needed it."

"Ah, then you have read the report? I didn't suppose he would want you to see it!" he said, with affected surprise.

"He left it with me," she explained. "And—why, Mr. Denman, his affairs must be in bad shape!"

Denman shook his head gravely, though his heart had given a great leap. "Poor fellow!" he murmured. "I'm afraid this mental trouble was coming on long before his accident occurred."

"But, your report, Mr. Denman," she pursued, turning him back to the topic which lay much nearer her heart; "I don't understand it."

"Ah!"

"Will you not explain it to me?" she asked.

"Assuredly—if you think he would not object," he answered, easily. "Or shall we three discuss it together?" He watched her furtively out of the corners of his eyes; and a little sigh of relief escaped him when she replied:

"I would rather talk it over with you alone, Mr. Denman. Come up to our house to-night, can't you?"

Whereupon, having secured what he sought, the lawyer politely took leave of Miss Greta at the next corner and returned in a happy frame of mind to his office.

CHAPTER 19

SMITH had agreed with Denman that he needed time—but not for the reasons alleged. And as he sat at his desk reflecting on the situation, while Mulligan droned over the corporation records at the far end of the room, he tried again to grasp in its fullness his very complex problem. He knew that Denman was determined to keep Filbert "wet," but he was becoming suspicious of the lawyer's motives. And Filbert *must* remain "wet," if the value of August Schmidt's property were not to depreciate to the vanishing point.

To render his own position doubly secure, there must be no postponement of his marriage with Greta Schwartz. Of course he should not see Molly Vaughn again—a perfectly safe resolution, however, in view of the ban under which she doubtless would pass her remaining days. As for Taft and Loring, he held a sword over their trembling heads that would fall at their first menacing gesture. Indeed, Smith reflected, the situation, at first so fraught with peril for him, was becoming daily more secure—at least but for one cloud which darkly lowered about the horizon. That cloud was Royal Denman. And how to checkmate him was now Smith's most serious problem.

While he sat burrowing through his mountainous thought, the door opened and Dr. Loring entered. Smith had learned to think swiftly in critical moments. He concealed his surprise and sat back expectantly.

The doctor drew out his handkerchief and held it aloft as he advanced. "Flag of truce," he said. Smith laughed and motioned him to a chair. Loring threw a cursory glance about the room, then sat down and remained for some moments staring into Smith's face.

"Well?" the latter demanded at length, growing nettled under the scrutiny.

Loring shrugged his shoulders. "The likeness certainly is amazing!" he muttered, as if in soliloquy. "One of Nature's most remarkable freaks. But," with a quick glance in Mulligan's direction, "that isn't what I came to discuss. Er—can that fellow hear?" jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the plodding clerk.

"Providence gave him ears, but held back on the brain," laughed Smith. "Fire away, Doctor."

Loring turned and spoke rapidly and in a low tone. "There is still time—and our offer holds good. Will you go?"

Smith did not permit expression to his surprise. He smiled blandly and shook his head.

Loring sat back and studied him for a moment. Then he leaned forward.

"The reform element of Filbert have demanded that I, as coroner, arrest the sheriff for non-enforcement of the Sunday-closing ordinance. The sheriff will look to you for support. But this is only the beginning of a sad imbroglio, if you insist on remaining—"

"Which I do," put in Smith, with a mean laugh.

"Then," snapped the doctor, "you are either a fool or an ignoramus! If the latter, I can help you."

"Thanks," said Smith, nodding in mock appreciation.

Loring disregarded the reply, and went on. "You cannot in any event get Schmidt's property," he curtly announced.

"But the man is dead," Smith retorted. "And I am in his shoes—even if they are a bit loose."

"Granted," returned Loring. "But what about Miss Schwartz?"

Smith laughed, so loudly that he startled the dozing Mulligan, who, having returned to his work after a glance in the mayor's direction, again roused sluggishly and sat staring at Doctor Loring, his eyes gradually widening and his cavernous mouth agape.

"Are you deluded by the belief that she will acquire it?" the doctor continued.

"Acquire it!" cried Smith. "Why, her father practically owns it now!"

"Is that what you deduced from Denman's report?" asked Loring, peering queerly over his glasses at Smith.

The latter's smile vanished. "What report?" he demanded, gruffly.

"Look here, my friend," said Loring, bending over the desk toward Smith and lowering his tone, "your presence in Filbert that Sunday night saved Taft and myself, and we are grateful. For that we have repeatedly offered to save you. Don't reject our offer. You will lose everything, perhaps your life, if you remain in Filbert. I do not threaten, I advise. Go now, while you have the opportunity."

Smith sat staring at the doctor with a look of unconcealed amazement on his face. Was Loring such a fool as to hope to remove him by dissimulation? And—

But how had Loring learned of Denman's report? Ah—Molly Vaughn! And then Smith's expression changed to one of contempt, and his lips curled in scorn. "Come to me and get your information at first hand after this, Doctor," he said, with disagreeable significance.

An unpleasant pause followed. Then Loring, undaunted, tried another tack. "Has it ever occurred to you," he abruptly asked, "that Greta Schwartz will never become your wife?"

Smith's reply was a blank stare.

"Then let me say," continued the doctor, grimly, "that she will not."

Smith recovered his voice, but not without an effort. "How's that?" he jerked out.

"Simply because Royal Denman is too shrewd to permit it," was the reply.

Smith sat upright and threw his shoulders back, as if bracing himself against his swelling wrath. And then—as doubtless would have occurred to August Schmidt—his anger burst its restraint and spouted forth, white-hot. "Royal Denman, eh?" he shouted, in a high falsetto voice. "And you would stoop to connivance with him to defeat me, would you?—"

As Denman's name echoed through the room and crashed upon Mulligan's elephantine ears, the city clerk raised his head with something of a jerk. A glance in the mayor's direction filled him with sudden horror. He scrambled from his high stool with unwonted alacrity and lumbered heavily to the angry man.

"Gintlemen! Gintlemen! F'r th' love o' th' Virgin!" he cried, thrusting himself between Smith and the doctor. "Yez should settle y'r diff'rinces at th' polls, ye should!"

Smith relaxed his torsion on the doctor's wrist, and fell back. Loring, with a final withering glance at Smith, turned and started toward the exit. "I shall take pleasure in attending your hanging, Mr. *Smith!*" he called back, as the door closed upon him.

Smith, with an imprecation, made a bound in his direction, but Mulligan held to him like a dragging anchor. In the struggle, Smith's sleeve had been pushed back, exposing the ugly scar on his arm—the memento of a boyhood tussle with Roger Taft—and Mulligan's eyes were now riveted upon it in fascination.

Then the mayor's sudden fury evaporated, almost as quickly as it had flared forth, and he gently disengaged himself from Mulligan's desperate grasp and returned to his desk.

"Don't say anything about this affair, Mulligan," he said, penitently, as he mopped the perspiration from his face. "I'll learn some day, I hope, to control this damnable temper of mine."

With a forced smile, he waved the dazed clerk back to

his stool, and then bent again over the littered papers on his own desk.

* * * * * *

Dr. Loring, bearing no evidences of his brush with Smith, entered the Traders' Bank that afternoon and cheerily greeted its president, whose desk was just at the right of the entrance.

"Burch is 'dry,' and doesn't care who knows it!" he called out loudly, "and that's more than you can say, eh, Gale?"

"For heaven's sake don't shout so's everybody can hear you!" cried Gale, his face flushing as he rose and pulled Loring into a chair. "How do you know I'm not 'dry'?"

"Because you didn't sign the 'dry' petition," replied Loring. "Afraid of the boycott, eh? Why, you old skinflint! you're worth a couple hundred thousand now, and yet you're afraid to stand for civic decency, lest it hurt your business. I'm ashamed of you! And now I learn that you've joined the Public Welfare League, behind which the liquor interests are masking. But you're too late, for Allen and his bank are going to handle the distillers' money that's to finance the campaign for the 'wets.' "

"The distillers' money?" echoed Gale.

"Yes," Loring explained. "The distillers have sent a hundred thousand dollars to Filbert to fight the 'drys,' and Allen gets the business. Guess it was because he joined Denman's gang before you did."

"But Denman—"

"Oh, yes, Denman's at the bottom of it all. He says the liquor interests are ready to spend a million dollars to defeat the 'drys' throughout the state. The whiskey makers boast that they simply can't be beaten—they've got the cash to offset every expenditure of the 'drys.' They intend to secure control of the legislature and repeal the township option law at the next session, as well as kill the woman's suffrage cause in this state. You see, money talks, and they're going to make it fairly shout. But, say, Gale, whose money is it that is shouting for them, eh? Whose but Tim Jordan's, and John Rimes', and yours—"

"Mine?" interrupted Gale. "What do you mean?"

"H'm—well, suppose you ask your son Fred—I assume that he is still spending your money, seeing that he is not in business yet."

"But he isn't spending it in saloons!"

"All right, all right," Loring replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But I looked in at Schmidt's lower Main Street place last evening, and I saw a boy hanging over the bar who mightily resembled Fred. And—well—I wouldn't want a son of mine frequenting that hell-hole!"

"But—why, Fred was at prayer meeting last night! And he came home—"

"Yes? At what time?"

"Why—why—" stopping and thinking hard.

"H'm! Yes, just so. Well, it is possible, of course, that Fred was in the saloon to study the composition of alcohol as part of his High School course in chemistry. And, Gale, alcohol is really very interesting from the chemical point of view. It is what is known as a hydro-carbon, and belongs to the same group as carbolic acid, chloral, strychnine, and morphine. It is a product of fermentation, in which process the ferment germs throw off waste products, just as other living organisms do. One of these waste products is a gas; the other is alcohol. Alcohol, then, is the poisonous offal of living organisms. And human beings drink it! Is it any wonder that it drives them crazy?"

Gale sat silent and with bent head during Loring's explanation. The latter waited a moment, then drove his unembellished meaning straight home:

"And human beings drink it, Gale, *the urine of living organisms!* Good God!"

The silence which followed was broken by the doctor. "Gale, you fought in the Civil War, didn't you? Fought to liberate the slaves."

The bank president looked up and nodded without speaking.

"Well," Loring continued gently, "why is it that you now refuse to fight to liberate America's five million hard drinkers, who are more terribly enshackled than the negroes

ever were? By joining the Public Welfare League you have become a slave driver. And, unless you are mighty careful, you will soon be driving your own beloved son—and for a few additional dirty dollars. Bah!"

"Did you come in here purposely to tell me this?" asked Gale, in a wavering voice.

"No," returned the doctor, with a curt laugh. "This is quite impromptu. I came in to see if I could get those old Vaughn papers that Molly left with you when her father died and the estate was settled. Let me see, you were one of the administrators, were you not?"

Gale nodded slightly. "I guess Schmidt and Denman know more about that than anyone else," he said. "But," with a gleam of suspicion in his eyes, "what do you want with them?"

Loring leaned over and laid a hand on Gale's arm. "Look here," he said, in a low voice, "you and I, Gale, have weathered many a storm together, and we've stood shoulder to shoulder. You had the courage to face Confederate bullets without flinching, but you haven't the moral courage now to face the anger of the liquor interests—and yet I know that in your heart you are 'dry.' I want those Vaughn papers. I—I can't tell you why—now. But—well, let's put it this way: If you find that your boy is frequenting the saloons, you will let me examine those papers, for I might find something in them that would help our cause—and our cause would then be yours, too. But, if you find that Fred does not go to the saloons, then I will never again ask to see the papers. Is it a bargain?"

The troubled look in Gale's face had deepened. Suddenly he reached out and seized Loring's hand convulsively. "Loring," he cried, in a voice of agony, "say that you didn't see my boy down there!—say it, old pal—say it—!"

A loud clanging of bells and shrill blowing of whistles in the street prevented Loring's reply. Both men rose and hastened to the window, just as the trucks and engines of the city fire department sped noisily past. Gale returned and inquired of the telephone operator the location of the fire.

"It's Lawver's sausage factory," he announced, hanging up the receiver. "Why, that's way beyond the fire limits, isn't it?"

Loring stood for a moment, reflecting. Suddenly his face lighted with a broad smile. "By George!" he exclaimed, "if the factory burns we'll learn something interesting." With which cryptic remark he hurried out of the bank and down the crowded street.

* * * * * *

"Mr. Denman!" exclaimed Greta Schwartz, as she rose to greet her caller. "It is very kind of you to come to-night."

"A very great privilege, my dear Miss Greta," replied Denman, with his most ingratiating smile, as he seated himself alone with her in the Schwartz parlor. "And one of which I wish I might have availed myself long ago," he added, with quite gratuitous suggestiveness.

She glanced at him, slightly puzzled; but as he pursued the topic no further, she was obliged to repress her curiosity.

"But the report, Miss Greta—you have thoroughly assimilated it, I presume?" he interrogated.

She took the document from the table and opened it. "I fear I am very dull, Mr. Denman," she gently lamented. "I find your legal terms so confusing."

He smiled, a tolerant, easy smile. "But they are really quite simple of explanation," he said, drawing his chair nearer. "May I?" gently taking the document from her hand.

She nodded her permission, and sat back expectantly.

"You see," he continued, blandly, "Gus never did quite understand the situation; and, of course, as his marriage with you would remove any adverse claim to the property, why, it was never really necessary to explain it to him. Nor is it now, and so—"

"But, Mr. Denman," she interrupted, "*I* want it explained —fully!"

He eyed her with quick comprehension, and his brows went up involuntarily; but he instantly suppressed the manifestation and proceeded with his usual calm.

"Er—the property, Miss Greta, is held by Gus under mortgage to your father, as you see—"

"But he can pay off the mortgage?"

"Oh, certainly—any time—provided he can obtain the money."

"He hasn't the money, then?"

Denman shook his head. "I fear not, Miss Greta."

"But the banks will lend it to him?"

Again he shook his head. "I think not—at least, until the local option question is definitely settled. You see, if they should lend him the money, and Filbert should then go 'dry,' the value of his property would be so reduced that they would face a large loss. If Filbert remains 'wet,' he doubtless can pay off the mortgages himself, in time. Possibly his friends would lend him the money. I know I would, if he should ask it."

A look of genuine surprise came into her face. "Why, Mr. Denman," she exclaimed, "could *you* lend him such a large amount?"

"I think so, Miss Greta," the lawyer assured her, with becoming modesty. "My influence with the distillers and brewers throughout the state is such that I could easily obtain it from them, if—"

"But couldn't Gus do the same?" she asked.

Denman kept silence for some moments, meanwhile watching her face furtively for anything to suggest a basis for reply. He seemed to find it in the unwontedly eager manner with which she awaited his answer.

"Really, Miss Greta, I—I haven't the right to discuss poor August's affairs. You'd better talk them over with him."

She drew herself up with some asperity. "I am not discussing *his* affairs, Mr. Denman, but my own. He has acted so queerly since—"

"Ah, yes, poor fellow," sighed Denman, again shaking his bald head. "His mental condition is causing us all worry these days. We have had to request him not to engage actively in the campaign as yet. And when the proximity of his marriage again recurred to me to-day, I was actually startled. But that is a matter for you two to discuss—"

"Mr. Denman!" she again broke in. "You frighten me!"

"Of course," he went steadily on, "you cannot risk marriage with him if there is any evidence of insanity. And as yet we are not prepared to—well, my dear Miss Greta, it is too delicate a matter for me to—"

He paused; and the shadow of a smile that crossed his sharp features indicated his satisfaction in so easily implanting the seed which he had hoped to sow.

"My dear Miss Greta," he resumed, in the most sympathetic tone, "I will gladly explain the report; but the distressing results of poor August's accident and sickness are matters that cannot properly form a topic of conversation between us, as you must see."

He sat back and watched her keenly. And when he saw the added effect of his oily words, he smiled.

"Tell me," she demanded, suddenly, "do you know where he was that Sunday night?"

He raised a hand in mock protest. "You really must not ask me," he gently insisted, but still smiling.

"Why did Belle Glover say that he was out of town?" she persisted.

"I do not know," he replied, "any more than I know why he went riding with Dr. Loring and Roger Taft at midnight—or why there was a light burning in Molly Vaughn's parlor at the same hour," he abruptly added, without other than the malicious desire to agitate the woman further.

"Molly Vaughn!" she cried, her eyes blazing. "Mr. Denman, why will Gus not take that boy from her? Can't it be done legally?"

"Oh, I think so, Miss Greta, under *habeas corpus* proceedings. He could bring them—"

"He has always refused when I asked it."

He thought for a moment. Then, with a curious light in his washed-out eyes: "Have you asked him since his accident?"

"No. Why?"

"Then do so," he suggested. "And—well, suppose you tell me what he says," he added, with an encouraging nod and the same pallid smile. "And now," he continued, "let us read the report in detail."

CHAPTER 20

DR. LORING dashed up the long flight of stairs and into the Civic League headquarters. Seizing Miss Hazard's arm, he drew that startled young woman quickly aside.

"We've got 'em on the hip!" he cried. "Listen! Lawver's factory burned yesterday. You know, we discovered that he was paying taxes on only a thousand dollars' worth of property. But since the fire he has told the insurance adjuster that his loss is thirty thousand dollars. And he is making that claim in to-night's papers. Look!" He spread open the two evening papers which he drew from his pocket and pointed out the items. "I think that will put the skids under the Honorable James!"

Miss Hazard's black eyes snapped as she read. When she concluded, she stood lost in reflection.

"And what's more," Loring continued, excitedly, "Taft has found that John Moller has been paying only ten dollars in taxes on his Baldwin Street house and four other properties combined. Think of it! Won't this make rich reading in to-morrow night's papers?"

Miss Hazard looked up at him. "I wonder—I wonder," she said, meditatively, "if this is not an opportune time for our long-contemplated call on General Diggin. We have an array of facts now that should persuade him to alter the tone of his editorials. What do you think?"

"Persuade him!" echoed Loring. Then he burst into a loud laugh. "A solidified, adamantine human mind, such as his, my dear lady, is not amenable to persuasion!"

"But our persuasion, Doctor, will be about as tender as the explosion of a bomb."

"We haven't the necessary materials for the bomb as yet," he objected. "But if—well, if we could get him entangled in some way—"

"We can!" she quickly interposed. "See here, Doctor, he is a Republican, isn't he? Well, what is he doing now

but vigorously supporting the Democratic party in his advocacy of the saloons? Now listen to me—"

Miss Hazard spoke rapidly, with now and then a little excess of excitement that caused her voice to ring out sharply through the big room. Her remarks met with frequent impatient gestures of demurral and deprecating shakes of the head from Dr. Loring, but her arguments, nevertheless, seemed gradually to assume a form acceptable to her doubting auditor, for at length he reached for his hat and, nodding vigorously, exclaimed: "That's the only sort of strategy that stands any show of success. I'm willing to give it a trial." Whereupon, without further parley, they set out for the editorial sanctum of the autocrat of Filbert's fourth estate.

They found him in his little, dust-laden room, balancing in a rickety office chair to which he had clung with the tenacity of a limpet for fifty-odd years, and slowly puffing a thick, black cigar, while gazing up reverently at a torn and stained engraving of General Sheridan which had hung over his decrepit desk at the same wide angle from the perpendicular for years untold. When his callers appeared, he turned and gazed at them blankly for a few moments, then got slowly to his feet.

Loring hung at the door; but Miss Hazard, summoning her moral courage, advanced and announced graciously: "We have called to talk over the character of the newspaper articles that you think you could accept from us, General."

The general glanced suspiciously from beneath his bushy brows at Loring, and then back at Miss Hazard.

"And we thought an amicable conference might lead to a better understanding and feeling," she continued, smiling pleasantly up into his wondering eyes.

He grunted his deep disgust and slowly sat down again. Miss Hazard, nothing daunted, took the only other seat the room afforded, a broken stool that wabbled crazily on three uneven legs.

"There seems to be danger," she went on, breezily, "of confusing the political with the moral issue in this campaign, General. Your editorials, while delightfully clear on every other topic, appear a bit hazy on the present—"

"They are nothing of the kind, madam," he interrupted, savagely. No greater offense could be offered him than a reflection upon the lucidity of his journalistic products.

"But you are a Republican—"

"I am, madam. And proud to be acknowledged as such. There is no nobler body politic in the world than the 'Grand Old Party.' It saved the American Union; it reconstructed the nation when rent and tottering; it has enriched us, protected us, made us a nation of churches and schools. I love the Republican party. I love it as—"

"Yes, yes," Miss Hazard broke in upon his rhapsodies. "And you wish to restore it to power—"

"Madam, it never for a moment lost its power! Even in those dark days, when I was in the Army and at the head of the regiment which I had the honor to command—"

"I see," she interrupted, desperately. "Then when it comes to a question of driving the Democratic gang out of power in Filbert, you are really with us?"

The wary general hesitated on the brink.

"I mean," she amplified, "you are opposed to the Democratic administration?"

"Absolutely, madam!" was his emphatic but safe reply.

"And you disagree with us, then, only on the question of liquor—is it not so?" she pursued.

"Er—possibly, madam, possibly. But, on that question, as uncompromisingly as the North opposed the South—"

The words seemed to start a familiar train of thought in the general's brain. A new light came into his faded eyes, and his brusque manner mellowed. "That reminds me," he slowly said, "of an episode that occurred in sixty-five, when I was in the Army—"

"Yes," again interrupted Miss Hazard; "but it is the present that we are most vitally interested in."

He looked at her reproachfully. "The present is a composite of the past," he answered, somewhat stiffly. "When the question of the canteen came before General Grant at—"

"But, as to Filbert, you would drive August Schmidt from power?" she persisted.

He sighed. Then, guardedly: "I would replace him with a Republican mayor."

Miss Hazard nodded to Loring, and the doctor stepped up to the general and laid a typewritten paper on the desk before him. The latter glanced up, then down at the paper. And then, as he read, the veins of his forehead began to swell.

"What," he demanded, sharply, after some moments of perusal, "is this?"

"An article to be run in the *Budget* to-morrow night, if you are willing," Miss Hazard explained.

A muffled roar escaped the general. He raised his fist and brought it down upon the desk with a crash. "And I am *not* willing!" he shouted. "My paper will print no more of your low calumnies!"

"But, General," interposed Miss Hazard from her high seat, "you have said that you wished to get rid of August Schmidt. This article will help you to do so. As you see, it says that taxes most certainly *will* be raised. And that, you know, has been your contention all along, as regards the suppression of the saloons."

He momentarily forgot his anger, and turned his dilated eyes upon her.

"The taxes of such men as James Lawver and Schmidt and Moller, I mean," she added, with a significant nod toward the paper.

Again his face reddened, and he started to rise. But Miss Hazard sent him back into his chair with another shot. "The *Tribunal* is going to print this in full to-morrow evening," she announced, calmly.

"The *Tribunal* is a dirty sheet, bought and paid for!" shouted the irate general, his fist again crashing down upon the rickety desk. "It is on its last legs, or it wouldn't lick the feet of you reformers for a few crumbs to keep the breath of life in it! It doesn't dare, low as it is, to print this article!"

"It not only will print the article," Miss Hazard continued, in the same mild voice, "but we intend to placard the town with it—unless—unless—" She hesitated, and sat looking at him expectantly.

His mountainous wrath flared out anew. "I tell you,

young woman," he bellowed, "I will not be dictated to, least of all in regard to the policy of my paper! The *Budget* stands for civic freedom, for the personal liberty which our laws guarantee to all, and which you women, obsessed with your phenomenal impudence, are seeking to destroy!"

"Personal liberty?" she echoed, sweetly. "I think you mean license, do you not, General?"

"I mean the license to sell liquor, if one chooses, under governmental protection and control," he cried.

"But, General, I think you forget that the Supreme Court of the United States has decided twelve different times that no citizen has the inherent right to sell intoxicating liquors."

He sat back, with a sort of gasp. How dared this woman oppose him!

"The 'personal liberty' argument, General," she went on, evenly, "is so time-worn that even the *American Brewers Review* admits that it has lost much of its force, and that considerations of public welfare have grown so as to overshadow the rights of the individual. This *Review* goes on to say that if the public welfare requires the suppression of the drink traffic, then it should be suppressed. You see, our government is really one of majority rule. But the justification of majority rule is experience. And so when experience shows that a law or a custom results in harm to a community, the majority may vote to abolish it. Unfortunately, however, human beings are not born with an intuitive knowledge of what is harmful and what is not. And so these questions of public polity come up with each successive generation. To-day the vital question before us is: Do you consider the saloon detrimental to the welfare, economic, moral, or social, of Filbert—"

"I do *not!*" he hotly interrupted. "Look at China, where intoxicating liquors are unknown. Wages in that country are lower than anywhere else in the world!"

"And would the introduction of liquor into China raise wages and better life-conditions there, do you think?" she asked.

"And look at Plainfield," he continued, disregarding her question, "where the saloons were voted out a year ago!

Once it was a happy, prosperous, law-abiding town. Now it is bankrupt, and festering with crime! Its savings banks report decreased accounts; its theaters are poorly attended; blind tigers are everywhere; its churches are about to close their doors—look at that stricken city, I say, and then tell me that local option is not a flat failure!"

"And that is what you fear for Filbert?"

"It is, madam, it is!"

"But, General, you have admitted that civic conditions in Filbert are already bad—and yet we have an abundance of saloons."

"It is the city administration that is bad," he corrected.

"Yet the city administration is 'wet,' and your mayor is a brewer and saloonkeeper. Tell me, General, can a city administration be 'wet' and good at the same time?"

"It most certainly can!" he replied.

"Then, General, make that clear in your editorials, and refer to some city that illustrates it, will you? For I am certain the people do not understand. Show them what 'personal liberty' really means—how each one of us has the right to eat dead cats, if we wish, or sleep with the pigs—how we have the right to make meat pies of diseased cattle, but have *not* the right to sell them for profit, for they are poisonous—and then explain just when a dose of poison is legal, and when not. You see, the foundation of our republic is *liberty,* not anarchistic license, and you should very carefully explain that to your readers.

"You see," she breezed pleasantly on, "your editorials must of necessity be so worded as to avoid alienating from the Republican party any anti-saloon people, for I presume you know that the Republican party contains a very large proportion of the 'dry' voters of Filbert and of the state. And so, with the national election coming so soon, you cannot afford to run the risk of losing any votes, can you? Already we hear the question: 'How much longer will the great Republican party continue to act as agent for the brewer and distiller?' And: 'Does the Republican party stand for genuine men, or wine men?' And so, if you wish time to express your views more clearly in the *Budget,* why,

we will withhold this article about Supervisor Lawver and Mr. Moller from publication. What do you say? It really rests with you."

The expression on the general's face had slowly altered as she talked, but at length it settled definitely into one of genuine perplexity. It was clear to his callers that he did not in the least comprehend the equivocal opportunity which Miss Hazard was offering him.

"Look here," he finally blurted, "is it possible that you prohibitionists really have the effrontery to proclaim that you can make men good by mere legal enactment? Is that why you are now raising so much vulgar clamor in once peaceful Filbert? The pernicious radicalism of you idle women—"

"Oh, General," protested Miss Hazard, "we really are *awfully* busy! We have at last recognized the fact that the men are utterly unable to solve the problems of the day unassisted by us."

"And so you plunge into politics—"

"We plunge into municipal affairs, General," she gently corrected. "We are trying to help those who have *inherited* their political faith—trying to show them how much better it is to *choose* their faith, after first *proving* it with unprejudiced minds. We advocate non-partisanship in municipal affairs. The day is passing, General, when partisanship shall supersede principle. Political parties are still necessary in state and national politics, but not in municipal government. You see, General, it is quite impossible to vote for a political party without at the same time voting for the things for which it stands—and both the Democratic and Republican parties stand committed to liquor. Don't you think, General, that it is about time the great Republican party rid itself of the incubus of liquor rule? Have you forgotten the infamous 'deadlock' in the legislature that lasted six weeks, during which time thirteen 'wets' had the state by the throat and held it, at a cost to the people of nearly two hundred thousand dollars, and then was broken only when rum rule forced a 'wet' speaker upon us?"

"You 'drys' are mere theorists!" he cried in exasperation. "Your talk shows it!"

"Well," she agreed, "if that is so, we'd like an opportunity to test our theories. Yours have been tried out thoroughly and found wanting. Now let's see what ours amount to."

"It isn't necessary," he retorted, vigorously. "Everybody know that prohibition doesn't prohibit—that the farmers of an agricultural community such as ours don't like a 'dry' town—that traveling men don't, either—that a 'dry' town means increased taxation, and—" He hesitated.

"There!" she exclaimed, leaning back against the wall and beaming at him. "You have now exhausted every argument of the 'wets'! Poor lot, aren't they? Now don't print them, General, for every one of them can be knocked into a cocked hat, and there will be left exposed the real motive of the liquor supporters, '*the defenseless appeal to greed and appetite*', as the Anti-saloon League of America declares."

Thus far Loring had kept silence, carefully watching the effect of Miss Hazard's bold words. But now, as the irascible general sat fuming with wrath and on the point of another violent outbreak, he stepped into the breach.

"It is a question of merit," he said, speaking rapidly so as to forestall the general. "Merit of opposing views. We ask that ours be given a trial. 'The paramount issue,' to use the words of Professor John M. Barker, 'is whether or not the individual shall project into the realm of society his personal privilege in the use of intoxicants by opening up a saloon to traffic in vice and make it institutional in character; and further, whether or not this same saloonkeeper, with the view of extending and protecting the traffic, has the right to join with other saloonkeepers and form a strong, compact organization which shall seek to control legislation, intimidate executive officers, and by its united political and financial influence threaten the peace and sanctity of the home, and defeat the suffrage rights of the people. It is plain that the definite issue that confronts us is not whether the individual shall use intoxicating liquors as a beverage, but whether the saloon as a social menace shall be maintained or suppressed.' And, 'No one should be diverted or side-tracked by fixing his attention

upon the irrelevant questions of sumptuary legislation, personal liberty, or the probable value of the beverage use of alcoholic liquors. The all-important question centers about the saloon'."

"And," Miss Hazard put in, "it is pretty generally admitted that the saloon, as it exists to-day, is the enemy of social well-being, that it is an intolerable nuisance, to say the least. Grant, if you wish, that men have the right to drink, the saloon has long since forfeited the right to exist—if it ever had such right."

"The time has come, General," said Loring, taking up the conversation, "when the citizens of Filbert are demanding answers to certain questions, such as: Is the making of drunkards—which the saloon admittedly does—injurious to the home, to society, to the state, and to the nation? If the government forbids crimes and imposes repression upon criminals and punishes for criminal acts, why does it discriminate in favor of the greatest of all causes of crime, liquor? The burden of proof, General, rests upon the liquor supporters themselves: it is for them to show why they should be the one exception—"

"And so we suggest, General," added Miss Hazard, eagerly, "that you make your position less equivocal in your editorials—"

"Just a mere suggestion," said Loring, now fully sensing Miss Hazard's tactics and seeing therein the possibility of hopelessly entangling the general. "And, regarding the anti-saloon articles that we may wish to run in the Filbert newspapers, can we not compromise on their character, and shape them to meet your approval as advertising matter?"

"I do not wish such advertisements!" returned the general, emphatically.

"But," protested Miss Hazard, "you advertise the churches, you advertise the saloons, the merchants. You set before the people what you are paid to set before them, do you not?"

"I discriminate, madam. I will not advertise anything that I believe to be detrimental to any one."

"And you are willing to state that in your editorial columns?" Loring quickly asked.

"I am, most certainly!" was the unhesitating reply.

Miss Hazard threw the doctor a quick glance and smiled. Then, addressing the editor: "Er—you fought in the Civil War, General, to free the slaves—"

"I fought, madam," the general replied, stiffly, "to save the Union. The freeing of the slaves was quite incidental."

"Yes, quite so," she cordially agreed. "And so now you will fight to preserve the health, the sanity, the national soul of this great country, and incidentally set free the five million human slaves owned body and soul by the liquor traffic. And you will fight to free Filbert from its enslavement to the Schmidt and Denman gang, is it not so, General? But you were saying a few minutes ago that when the subject of the canteen came before General Grant, he—"

The general's eyes brightened and his dour looks rapidly mellowed. He seized the bait, and in a moment had sped with it back, far back, to the fateful days of the rebellion. Miss Hazard, knowing what was coming, settled down upon her stool, resigned to the ordeal which she had purposely invited. Loring leaned up against the dusty wall and sought diversion in counting the musty tomes in the general's unused law library, or watching the traffic in the darkening street through the grimy windows. And the factory whistles sounded the hour of six before the rapt general's droning voice ceased and his exhausted auditors were allowed to creep back into the twentieth century.

"And, General," sighed Miss Hazard, as she clambered painfully down from the high stool and straightened her stiffened knees, "you are opposed to sending Mayor Schmidt to the legislature, are you not?"

"Absolutely, madam!" he said, as he gathered up his papers and prepared to leave for the night. "And I—I think, after further consideration, I will accept your suggestion and set forth my position in the editorial columns of the *Budget* next Saturday. I am indebted to you, madam, for reminding me of it—and," he added, with a courteous bow, "for an exceedingly pleasant hour's conversation."

When Miss Hazard and the doctor gained the street, Loring turned upon the young woman. "Well," he ex-

claimed, "we fought the war all over again, didn't we? I feel as if I had stormed Lookout Mountain!"

"It was worth it, Doctor," she replied between groans, as she limped along, "for he will certainly tangle himself all up in his editorials of explanation and be kept busy re-explaining until after election. For, Doctor, he simply can't separate the city administration from the liquor interests, try as he may. And the result will be further enlightenment and a lot more votes for us. You'll see, Doctor, you'll see."

CHAPTER 21

AND Dr. Loring did see, but in a vista so complex that the entanglement of General Diggin formed but a minor detail of the *ensemble*. And Smith saw, too, but in a rush of events which fairly telescoped upon one another during the weeks of frenzied activity which now engulfed Filbert. To him these were weeks of mad struggle with variant emotions, of conflict of heart and head in a pall of dull confusion. They were also weeks of swift enlightenment, against which he opposed himself vainly. And the tumbling, jostling events now seemed to be rushing madly to a crisis, bearing him along like tossing jetsam. One by one he had seen his supports fail; and, lastly, he himself had struck down the hand which Dr. Loring had extended to save him.

For days he had remained buried in his business affairs, hovering like a wraith about his saloons and his brewery, silent, gloomy, repellant, but striving—only himself could know how desperately!—to acquire a taste for the business. And why should he not acquire a love for a business so immensely profitable as his? He had found, on searching the records, that the average daily receipts of his saloons had been something over forty dollars, a yearly total of not less than twelve thousand dollars. But, because he also owned and operated the brewery which produced the beer sold in these saloons, this annual income was very largely profit. And he knew that the profits of his associate

saloonkeepers in Filbert were almost as great. To many of these he sold his own beer, at a dollar and forty-five cents a barrel. He knew that each barrel of beer retailed over the bar for from thirty-five to forty dollars, yielding a profit that no legitimate business could ever be expected to return. With the license fee costing a thousand dollars, he figured that each of Filbert's fifty-odd saloonkeepers was enjoying an annual income from his business of not less than six thousand dollars. And this, he knew, was their most potent reason for fighting the reform interests to the death!

Yes, his business was immensely profitable—and yet the joy of seeing the money pour over his bars was always alloyed with the disquieting reflection that it came from those who could illy afford to spend it thus; that it was wrung from the home, from the shivering, the hungry, the suffering, to exchange with him for the poisonous offal of low germs! And the thought sickened him. He knew he was making a living, but not a life.

He had intended to purchase an automobile—a dream of years. But on the day the agent exhibited the car to him the conflict raged so fiercely in his soul that he cursed aloud as they drove through the streets. Why, when he glanced through the windows and saw ragged, ill-fed children, must he wonder, against his will, how many of these little ones had been robbed ere the price of that luxurious car filtered into his saloon tills? And why, sharply rounding a corner, must he catch sight of Molly Vaughn and little Karl, making their way along the icy walks to the markets for their poor purchases? Well he knew that no bountiful largess to church or charity would ever soothe a conscience so accursedly active as his; no display, however garish, of wealth thus acquired, could make him the gentleman, the citizen of respect and confidence, that he had always hoped to become. He was a parasite, a social parasite, with an existence as sordid and low as that of the germs whose writhing bodies exuded the poison which he exchanged for money. He knew now that, as the possessor of wealth derived from liquor, he would always be placed sorely on the defensive.

He turned upon the agent and sharply bade him drive to the city hall. "I'll not buy the car," he said, when he dismounted. "The cost is—"

A thousand wan, pinched faces of little children seemed to crowd the air before him.

"—excessive," he concluded, turning from the amazed and disappointed agent and entering the hall.

* * * * * *

Miss Caroline Hazard leaned back in her chair and wiped her pen with the latest anonymous letter received from the "wets."

"This is the day of organization," she reflected, audibly. "Without it, the voter can not be reached, nor the vote brought out. And upon the day of organization the day of coöperation is swiftly crowding. Oh, it is wonderful to be alive!—wonderful to be so absorbed in the activity of good that one forgets the flight of time! They say that is the reason why God never wearies—He is so absorbed in His work."

The maid entered and announced Dr. Loring. Miss Hazard rose at once to receive her caller.

"Well?" she queried, standing expectantly.

The doctor bent over her hand; then straightened up and broke into a loud laugh. "Lawver did it!" he cried. "The afternoon papers are just out." He spread open a copy of the *Budget* upon the library table and bent over it.

"Seems that Lawver went to Schmidt and threatened to sue the city because no hydrants had been placed near his sausage factory. Blunder number one. The mayor became angry and told him to go ahead with the suit, but that he in turn would tell about Lawver's paying taxes on only a thousand dollars' worth of property. Blunder number two. Whereupon the blithering Lawver comes out in the papers to-night with this article, stating publicly that he has decided not to bring suit against the city, because he dislikes the unpleasant notoriety connected with it! Great Scott, but this will throw Denman into a convulsion!"

Miss Hazard read the article, and then looked up at Loring with an exclamation. "Doctor," she said, "if the

people of Filbert who are really 'dry' will only awaken to their strength—if they will only use the power that is really theirs, and that the 'wets' secretly concede to them—if they will only stand together—why, they can do anything they wish!"

"But there is no need of their doing anything!" exclaimed the doctor, with a laugh. "Just let the 'wets' alone, and they will hang themselves."

"Yes," she returned, meditatively, "this episode alone should cause their defeat. Certainly it will defeat Mr. Lawver."

"I don't see how they can counteract it," Loring continued. "Nevertheless, we must watch Denman more closely than ever now."

"And the mayor, too," she added.

"Bah!—the mayor!" Loring exclaimed, contemptuously. "He's out of the running—"

But he checked himself, and quickly changed the subject. "What success did you have with the *Tribunal?*" he asked. "That is what I came to find out. I didn't dare ask you over the 'phone, the wires are so closely watched by 'wet' spies."

Miss Hazard's eyes glistened. "Mr. Ross, editor of the *Tribunal,*" she replied, "is contemplating a most radical course, that of barring from his paper all advertisements of liquor and of medicines containing alcohol."

"You don't mean it!" the doctor ejaculated. "How did you discover that?"

"From his wife—but don't breathe a word of it! If it should get out now, it might—"

She was interrupted by the maid, who entered to announce another caller. Close upon her heels followed the Honorable William McCarty, bowing and smiling, and extending his enormous hand in greeting. Miss Hazard threw Loring a glance of consternation, then collected herself and faced the bulky alderman.

"I thought I saw you trailing me, McCarty," said Loring, with ill-concealed indignation. "You're a clumsy spy!"

"Them's hard words, Doc," returned McCarty, still

smiling. "But in times like these I don't lay 'em up agin ye. Th' sit-u-ashun's strained, an' what's fightin' talk in times av peace is only th' polite exchange av complemints now. But to th' pint. I see ye air figurin' somewhat on th' fool stunt av Supervisor Lawver. 'Tis a bit av a warnin' I want to give yez—that's why I've called," nodding to Miss Hazard.

" 'Twon't do to go too far," he continued, seating himself without invitation from the dazed young woman. "An' to play up th' personal mistakes av our frind Lawver ain't stickin' to th' rale issue. Our side ain't stoopin' to personalities, if ye've noticed."

"You are sticking only to liquor?" suggested the doctor.

"That's th' idea! An' we ain't draggin' in woman's suffrage, an' sich like."

"But, Mr. McCarty," said Miss Hazard, "you have no *real* objection to women going to the polls, I am sure."

"Not if it's th' north an' south poles, Miss," McCarty shot back, with a twinkle in his little eyes.

Miss Hazard and the doctor laughed at the quick sally. "Well," she replied, at length, "I think you have good reason to fear, for no fewer than sixty out of every hundred women are against the saloons. They are asking what proportion of the nearly two billion dollars spent annually in the United States for liquor goes to them. They have learned that, from a purely economical standpoint, they don't get their fair share of the returns and are justified in voting the saloons out of existence."

"Ah, but, me frind," McCarty hastened to rejoin, "that don't stop th' business, f'r whin th' saloons is closed iviry man in town 'ill be carryin' a corkscrew an' bottle opener in his pocket—they all do in 'dry' towns. An' th' blind tigers—Oof! Why, even if Filbert goes 'dry' ye can't inforce th' law!"

"That argument has been exploded long since," returned the young woman, calmly. "I have letters from more than a hundred state's attorneys here," pointing to a letter file, "which prove that 'violations of the liquor laws decrease in dry territory and become fewer in number than when

the territory was wet.' And when we wipe out the present city administration—including yourself, Mr. McCarty—there will be no difficulty about enforcing the liquor laws."

The alderman's eyes popped, and his jaws parted company, but he held himself admirably.

"Besides," Miss Hazard continued, "we don't mind violations of the liquor laws so much when they result, as they always do, in legal prosecutions and the consequent payment of large sums into the city treasury by the offending liquor men. Why, since the anti-saloon territory law was passed, more than a million dollars has been paid into county treasuries by violators of the law. It is really good business, isn't it? Makes up for the licenses somewhat. As for blind tigers, you know without my telling you that there are nearly thirty right here in Filbert now. So you liquor men should be careful about citing your own lawlessness as a reason why your business should be licensed."

"But," protested McCarty, "th' majority av licensed saloonkeepers is straight!"

"As straight as a corkscrew, McCarty," put in Loring, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Arra, thin!" cried McCarty, turning to the doctor, "y'r little jokes don't feaze me wan bit, f'r I ain't come to parley wid yez, but to warn yez not to go too far wid y'r personalities, and to lave Mr. Lawver out o' th' question ontirely."

"And if we don't, what then?" asked Miss Hazard, leaning forward and looking the alderman straight in the eyes.

"Well, all I've got to say is that we've facts that'll sound onpleasant if they're aired—"

"Who has them?" Loring demanded, curtly.

"Mr. Denman," said McCarty, confidently nodding his great head.

There was something of a tremor in the doctor's voice as he put the next question. "And they have to do with—with Mayor Schmidt?"

"As f'r that, I dunno," McCarty frankly admitted.

"Well," said Loring, "you ask him. Then come and tell me what he says."

"He says already he's got facts that'll put you an' Mr.

Taft in consider'ble embar-rass-mint if he chooses to use 'em. I ain't sayin' nawthin' but to warn yez. Play fair an' let Mr. Lawver alone, an' all'll be well."

"And what is your idea of playing fair, McCarty?" asked Loring.

"Doin' unto others as ye'd have 'em do unto yous," the alderman promptly replied.

Loring threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"'Tain't so funny, Doc," said McCarty, in a peevish tone. "'Tain't so funny to th' three hundred men ye air tryin' to throw out av imploymint. What's their wives goin' to do thin, eh?"

"Well," returned the doctor, still laughing, "they might turn around and wash for the poor women who are taking in washing now because their husbands are drunkards. That's only fair play, isn't it?"

"Whist!" cried McCarty. "Do ye listen to that! That shows ye ain't got sound argumints. Ye air too radical altogithir! We ain't opposin' th' regula-shun av th' saloons—"

"But we are," interrupted Miss Hazard. "We are for their annihilation."

"'Tis so!" ejaculated McCarty. "An' to that ixtint air yez anarchists! Yez would trample under foot th' sacred principles av personal liberty!"

"Say, McCarty," Loring observed, "do you know who first discovered the sacred doctrine of personal liberty?"

"Who did, Doc?"

"A fellow by the name of John Barleycorn."

"H'm. I don't ricollict ivir hearin' av him," returned McCarty, in all seriousness. "But I will say he diskivered a sound doctrin' which should have th' respict av iviry citizen who loves his fellow beings, f'r nobody's got th' right to prevint a hard-workin' man fr'm enjoyin' his crock o' suds at th' close av day—"

"Nor the rich man from riding his pony of brandy straight to hell, if he chooses, eh?" the doctor added.

"'Tain't the pint!" cried McCarty, growing nettled. "Yez air that selfish yez can't give a thought to th' industries av Filbert that'll be hurt if th' town goes 'dry'!"

"Yes," observed Miss Hazard, dryly, "the undertaking industry, for example."

McCarty squinted hard at her out of his little red eyes for some moments. "Faugh!" he ejaculated, in disgust; "'tis arguin' wid a post, I am! An' I'll bid yez good day," he concluded, rising. "I only come to give yez me bit av a warnin'—"

"Did Mr. Denman send you?" Loring abruptly asked.

"He did—that is," McCarty hastened on in some confusion, "he says as how ye weren't aware av what ye was doin' an' 'twould be wise to advise yez a bit."

Loring rose and stood for some moments, reflecting. Then he again addressed the alderman. "McCarty," he said, reaching out and taking the alderman's bulky hand, "we are the best of friends, I know. And you have befriended me by bringing this warning. But, tell me more. Just what does Mr. Denman refer to? To—well, possibly to the mayor's accident and my—my treating him? You've heard him speak of that, of course."

"Many's th' time, Doc," said McCarty, mellowing under the doctor's manifestation of friendship. "I've heard him hint that ye knew more about th' mayor's accidint than what yez have told. An', Doc, it's me that thinks he refers to that whin he warns ye to go easy wid Lawver."

Loring squeezed his hand. "I shall not forget your kindness, McCarty," he said. "And, if you overhear anything more that you think I ought to know, come right to me. We've got to play fair, as you say."

When McCarty had bowed himself awkwardly out, Loring turned excitedly to Miss Hazard. "General Diggin's editorials come out to-morrow night! Ross must publish his ban against liquor advertisements to-morrow night too! They must come out together!"

"But Mr. Ross hasn't fully decided to bar liquor advertisements as yet," said Miss Hazard, in surprise.

"But I have decided for him!" cried Loring. "Denman has something on me—McCarty told the truth there! Yes, I know what it is, but I can't tell you—and you must never refer to it! Whatever we do now must be done quickly.

My plan is to strike immediately, and hard, come what may! Ross needs money. I will get it from Gale—he will be glad enough to let me have it, now that he knows his son has started along the alcoholic road to hell—and I'll *make* Ross come out with his ban to-morrow night—I'll *make* him!"

Miss Hazard stood at the window and watched the tall figure of the doctor hurrying down the street. "I wonder what it is," she mused. "They say he poisoned the mayor that Sunday night. And—certainly the mayor is different now. I wonder."

CHAPTER 22

LIKE a crash from a clear sky came the *Tribunal's* editorial announcement the next evening of its ban on all forms of liquor advertising. Loring had accomplished his purpose, although the town clock had tolled the hour of three that morning before the haggard doctor dragged himself wearily out of the editor's office. But he had done his stint in adding another victory to the nation-wide movement to bar liquor advertisements from reputable publications. The *Tribunal* had at last lined up with the growing number of daily papers whose editors had the moral courage to refuse to aid in creating a market for the poisons of the liquor trust.

That same evening General Diggin, stirred by Miss Hazard's subtle suggestion, bellowed forth through the columns of the *Budget* a scathing denunciation of the local administration and all concerned therewith in an over-zealous effort to make clear the fact that he had been born a Republican, was a Republican now, and would die a Republican—that the great war, in which he had had the honor to command a regiment, had been won by Republican principles—and that the protective-tariff pap upon which he had been nourished had penetrated to the very core of his militant soul!

The combined effect upon Royal Denman of the *Tribunal's* stand and the general's editorials was akin to

prostration. As soon as he had read the fire-spitting *Budget* he summoned General Diggin to the telephone and berated the proud old warrior as a doddering idiot, unsafe to be at large. The general, in turn, defied the angry lawyer over the wire and swore so fiercely that the operator, bribed by Denman to listen carefully to all conversations, uttered a frightened "Oh!" into the instrument and clapped her hands over her little ears. And the quarrel raged until the apoplectic general issued a challenge then and there to the lawyer, with a threat to shoot him on sight if the challenge were not immediately accepted.

Denman threw the receiver upon its hook and hurried out, his brain aflame with murder-thoughts. What availed his leadership, when such dolts as Diggin, Lawver, Mulligan and the mayor constantly thwarted his efforts by their idiotic blunders, and brought defeat upon him and his cause? What interest had he in keeping the town "wet," when it was certain he would benefit financially to the same extent by handling the cases of the saloonkeepers who would be prosecuted for infringement of the liquor law if the "dry" cause won?

The cool night air played upon his burning skin and slowly assuaged the hot flood within. He walked rapidly for several blocks, and as he did so his cerebration again became normal. His interests were financial, he reflected, but the stakes were enormous: nothing less than the Schwartz fortune, intact and secure, and the incalculable prestige, moral, civic, and financial, which would be his when he played the trump card which, he was becoming daily more firmly convinced, he would hold in his hand. Yes, Filbert *must* remain "wet," however low the methods which he must employ to keep her so. His own selfish ends once accomplished, the town might dry up until it cracked open!

He had called again upon Miss Greta on Wednesday evening—but not until he had ascertained from Burns that Schmidt had just concluded his biweekly call at the Schwartz home. He had found Miss Greta highly agitated over the continued eccentricity of the mayor, and therefore

quite fallow to the subtle suggestions which he was prepared to sow upon her disturbed thought. When he left her presence that evening, he knew that the rift between her and the mayor was not likely to close.

But the blunders of his associates were a perpetual exasperation and danger, and his wit was sorely tested to meet the additional strain which they occasioned. If he could strike quickly, as he believed he would eventually strike hard, he would crush his opponents. But his method was perforce one of slow exhaustion, while awaiting the filling of the winning hand which he hoped to lay down when the stakes were assured.

At the foot of the stairway leading to his office he found Burns. "He's wid th' Vaughn woman," whispered the former policeman, with a significant nod of his head. "I seen 'em through th' window."

"And Loring?" Denman asked.

"Wid Miss Hazard, up in th' Civic League headquarters."

The man's words seemed to afford Denman an idea. "Burns," he said, "I want to get evidence that Miss Hazard and Loring are in his office, or in any room together—but alone. Keep that in mind. What's that you've got?" pointing to a placard in the man's hand.

Burns held it up with a sheepish grin. "Found it hanging on th' cemetery gate this evenin'," he said.

Denman took it and read aloud: "'A Key To This Gate May Be Found In Any Saloon In Filbert'."

He laughed, and handed it back to Burns. "Quite appropriate," he commented. "But destroy it, and don't mention it to any one. Now, have you been in Schmidt's saloons to-night?"

"Both of 'em, Mr. Denman. Nawthin' doin'. Mr. Howlett's been around wid me. Said he would see you later in the evenin'."

"Well, keep your eyes open." With which the lawyer started up the stairs to his office.

"But—Mr. Denman—"

The latter turned and waited, hopefully.

"Mulligan's told ye of th' fight atween th' mayor an' Doc Loring?"

"Eh? No!"

"An' as how Mulligan seen a big cut on th' mayor's arm—"

"What? Say, come up to my office, Burns, and tell me what you're driving at!"

* * * * * *

Smith's few calls on Miss Greta Schwartz had always been brief and perfunctory, but the one which he paid the young woman that Saturday evening had the added quality of ominous strain. The change in her demeanor was apparent to him immediately he entered her presence. And the apprehension which had lain dormant for many days was fanned into renewed life by her subsequent enigmatic glances, her curt observations, and her quixotic references. This apprehension had to do at first only with his identity; but it assumed a totally different phase when she returned Denman's report, with the pregnant observation that it had been better for them both had he revealed the true state of his affairs to her before. And when, later in the evening, she demanded that, for the sake of appearances, he should remove little Karl from the pernicious influence of Molly Vaughn, Smith saw that the matter of his identity was quite subordinate to certain other ideas with which his betrothed had become engrossed—under what subtle influence, he knew not as yet.

But this afforded him little relief. He must retain his hold on this woman at any cost; for then, even if Filbert went "dry," he had the Schwartz fortune to fall back upon. But, if he lost her, and the election as well, he was ruined!

He terminated his call with a sordid promise. He knew it was sordid, and he blushed when he made it. But he gave it in exchange for her consent to seriously consider advancing the date of their marriage from the thirtieth to the first of March. And yet her consent to do that left him in far greater mental confusion and perplexity than before.

His head was sunk on his breast as he strode back to his rooms that night. He condemned himself as a worse

than Judas, for he had bargained to betray a helpless woman and her babe! He cursed the fate that dangled the golden bauble before his famished sight, but exacted from him every shred of self-respect ere she permitted his itching hands to close upon it. Why must he, of all men, be put to such a test? Three short weeks ago he was an aimless plodder, whom the goad of ambition had not touched in many a year. This night he was angling among the clouds.

Among the clouds? Involuntarily he glanced at his hands. They seemed to him slimy with mire! He looked up. The Undine still danced on ahead of him. Was he responsible for the temptation, or for his own lamentable weakness? And was it weakness—or only a manifestation of the survival of the fittest, that convenient refuge of the commercialized human mind? He, the wealthy brewer, should survive! Molly Vaughn must sink—was he not the fitter? Was he not—

He stopped, reflected for a moment, then resumed his walk, only to halt again abruptly after a few steps. His hesitation lasted but a second. Setting his lips tightly, and squaring his shoulders in a determined manner, he turned on his heel and started off in another direction.

The Lure beckoned him on; but its refulgence diminished as he pursued it. Its gleam narrowed. It fluttered and sank—and then became a flicker, the fitful flicker of Molly Vaughn's cheap kitchen lamp.

He stood for an instant with his hand on the rickety gate. The hour of nine was striking. The miserable load on his mind seemed to grow increasingly heavier. He made a gesture of impatience, then threw the gate roughly open, and entered.

"I have been expecting you, August," the woman said, in a gentle voice, as she admitted him. "But don't wake Karl. He went to sleep still talking of you, and wondering why 'papa' didn't live with us."

Smith crept in like a thief. The mean appearance of the low-ceiled little parlor smote him, and he stood hesitant before the shabby upholstered chair toward which she motioned him, seeking something to say. His furtive glance

fell upon the littered table. He moved slowly to it and mechanically took up a morocco card case. It bore Dr. Loring's name in gold letters on the cover.

Smith's expression instantly hardened. The woman's watchful eyes caught the change, and an enigmatical smile curved the corners of her mouth.

He looked up at her. "Karl sick?" he asked, curtly.

She shook her head.

"Humph! Not a professional call then?"

She looked from the card case up into his accusing eyes. "No," she answered, simply.

The patient forbearance of the woman nettled him. His anger rose. And with it mingled emotions of a sort that he had not thought possible of stimulation by her. He turned with a sneer, and said, coarsely: "Must have fled in a hurry. Did he leave by the back door?"

Her face crimsoned deeply; her lips parted and her breast rose and fell quickly.

And then the pathetic whiteness returned to her thin cheeks, and she smiled again. "I am sure, August, that those words do not come from the *real* 'you'," she said, gently.

The quaver in her voice shook his base resolution. A revulsion swept over him, and for a moment he felt like the lowest criminal. Then the thought of his errand recurred, and he wavered. With a mental effort which contorted his face, he choked down the better impulse.

"When I find evidence like this," he continued, in a low, ugly tone, and holding aloft the card case, "I think it time I removed little Karl from such an environment."

Again her lips parted. She fell back a step under the cowardly blow and stood looking at him in a puzzled way.

"And," he hurried on, with the cold, dispassionate relentlessness of a hound pursuing a hare, "I have come to tell you that he must be taken—"

He stopped, awkwardly, startled at his own recklessness, ashamed of his own cowardice. She turned to her chair and took up her sewing. His words had not produced the anticipated effect, but, instead, had left him overwhelmed

with embarrassment and confusion. For a moment he watched her white fingers; then his glance strayed to her soft hair, glittering like wire gold in the mellow light of the lamp.

She raised her eyes. "Karl has prattled about you all day," she said, softly. "You have won the little fellow. He seems to have quite forgotten how cross his fa—I mean, how cross you used to be with him."

The conflict between shame and material greed raged wildly in Smith's burdened soul. Why did this woman tolerate him?—why, in God's name, if August Schmidt had avoided her, after so foully staining her soul and inhumanly repelling the loving advances of his own child, did she now permit him, whom she believed to be her betrayer, under her lowly roof? Why—unless she knew his secret?

Fear clutched his soul anew. He licked his dry lips and mopped his brow. "I have no time for sentimentalities," he said, meanly. "I have thought this matter over carefully, and—"

"And you think you are right, August?" she interrupted, in the same low, unimpassioned voice, as she bent again over her work. "You would not have either of us stand as an obstacle to the child's progress? Perhaps you are right. I have wondered, myself."

Her equivocal words augmented his irritation and his disgust with his own weakness. "I think," he snapped back, "we agreed that we should make amends to the child."

She gave a little sigh, and leaned back, with her eyes upon the dingy ceiling. Her white hands lay like marble on her unfinished work.

"And so you think he should be taken and brought up to honor his father and respect his father's business, do you, August? For of course you would have him trained to the liquor business. Ah, yes, that will bring him money—and, oh, August, what else is there worth striving for? Perhaps I have done wrong, for I have tried to instill in him a different spirit from that of our modern America. I have wanted him to know that morality is not a dead force; I wanted him to know, without the bitterness of

experience, that bonds and lands and gold do not create happiness—but that right thinking does. He bears the image of the Divine in his pure little soul to-day; I have sought to shield it from the mesmeric glitter of gold, and from the insane ambition which makes men estimate the characters of their fellows in dollars and cents. But perhaps I did wrong—perhaps."

In the silence that again enveloped them she resumed her sewing. Smith, his eyes big with amazement, sank slowly into a chair.

"I have often dreamed of the boy's future, August," she continued, without looking at him. "When my eyes have burned with the strain of constant sewing I have leaned back in my chair and pictured him—not as you would make him, corrupted with the Schwartz fortune, sleek, crafty, corroded, and morally dead, leaning over the wet bars of the saloons inherited from you, and clutching feverishly at the disease-laden money that the wretched, mesmerized slaves of his poison will barter for misery, insanity, and death. No, August, not that way! Nor as a great brewer, with enormous paunch and drooping jowls, with magnificent diamond studs and rings, with a massive gold chain draped across his ample vest, and sitting back in the luxurious cushions of his splendid limousine, while the wheels crunch over the bones of his victims—Oh, no, not that way! Do you want me to tell you how I have pictured him? Do you want me to help you by telling you something about your business—something that you don't know as yet? Shall I tell you about the mystery of man's desire for alcohol? And shall I tell you how the drink problem must be eventually solved? Shall I, August?" she persisted, laying down her work and leaning wistfully toward him.

But he remained sullenly silent. A faint gleam flickered across her face as she looked at him. Then she drew a scarcely perceptible sigh and again took up her work.

Smith sat lost in a maze of dubious speculation. The woman's words stung him, and left a constantly deepening sense of shame. And shame, he knew, meant defeat, if he yielded to it. The thought stirred his slumbering anger.

"I am waiting for you to explain Loring's presence here," he said, coldly.

"Why, August, he is working for us—for us both," she replied.

His thought flew quickly back to his first night in Filbert, and for a moment his heart pulsated violently. With his increased agitation came a craving for the comforting ministration of nicotine. Involuntarily he drew forth a cigarette and bent toward the lamp—but caught himself and turned his flushed face to meet her shrewd glance. He laughed unpleasantly, and crushed the cigarette in his fingers. Then he made a hasty gesture, but she interrupted it.

"I am sorry, August, that you quarreled with him—and sorry that you are now seeking a quarrel with me. I understand it all. It isn't that you fear for Karl—"

"He should be removed from this environment—"

"But the environment, August, is of your making, you know," she patiently reminded him.

He clutched desperately at his self-respect and crushed it down. His unsteady glance reverted to the table and rested upon the card case. "But I am not responsible for Loring's coming here!" he retorted, with ugly significance.

"Oh, yes, you are, August," she gently replied.

"What, I—? Look here," he demanded, "what sort of a game are you and he playing—or," in a lowered tone, "have you returned to your former life—"

He stopped dead before her upraised hand, with the words frozen on his lips. For a moment she held him, quailing like a criminal. Then she smiled wistfully.

"It is not a game, August," she said, slowly. "We are working—for you. But I cannot tell you more. Will you not trust us, and wait?"

The pathos of it all smote him, and he loathed the dirty business he was engaged in. But the last words of Greta Schwartz were still echoing in his thought: "Mr. Denman says it will make for your respectability and help our cause if you take that unfortunate child away from Molly Vaughn." And fear held him, and drove him to the sacrifice of his own manhood.

He rose. "I shall send for Karl to-morrow," he said, slowly and deliberately.

She gave a little gasp. "August—you don't really mean it, do you? You are not in earnest? Don't you remember, August, when you were last here we said we would work together, you and I—don't you remember? And you said you would let me teach you. Aren't you taking your lessons from—from some one else, August?" The pathetic wistfulness of her voice cut him like a knife.

But he would not meet the pitiable appeal in her tired eyes. "Tell me Loring's real business here," he demanded, roughly. The heavy image of Miss Greta and her money bags floated sluggishly before his mental gaze.

She rose impressively and came to where he stood. "August," she said, firmly, "I am not deceived. Nor is Doctor Loring. But you are—and it is a terrible deception. We have tried to save you, but you cast us off for the reed that is breaking in your grasp. Miss Greta will never—"

"Don't you speak disparagingly of her—"

She laughed scornfully into his face. "I knew that was it," she said, with curling lips. "Oh, you poor, deceived man!"

Smith's wrath burst forth in a towering flood. "Do you compare yourself with her?" he cried. "You, who stooped to the gutter! You, whose home is the resort of men like Loring! I tell you it's high time Karl was taken from his mother—"

He stopped short in his condemnation, for with these last words her countenance had suddenly altered.

"His *mother!*" she echoed. Then the two stood staring into each other's glittering eyes.

Smith was the first to move. Without further speech, he took his hat from the table and went to the door. He paused at the threshold and looked back to where she stood.

"I—I," choosing his words, "I will send a Sister from Saint Catherine's orphanage for Karl to-morrow," he said.

She raised her head imperiously. "You do not dare, Charles Smith!" she flung at him.

He staggered back, as if from a heavy blow, and clutched

at the door. She threw him a final look of mingled defiance and disdain, and then turned and went slowly into the room beyond, where lay the child. Smith's wild gaze followed her until she disappeared. Then, with the mocking taunts of a thousand devils ringing in his ears, he groped his way blindly out.

CHAPTER 23

SMITH rose, weary and depressed, at nine the next morning, and prepared to obey a summons to the court of the police magistrate. And the preparation consisted chiefly of much gloomy meditation, interspersed with excessive cigarette smoking in lieu of breakfast.

For a dram-shop brawl of the lowest type had occurred in his lower Main Street saloon that morning as he was leaving for his rooms. An Italian, released from his monotonous week's grind, had set out on Saturday night in search of amusement in the only place where our social system provides diversion for such as he, the saloon. At one o'clock in the morning, when the crowded place was dim with tobacco smoke, he had lurched against a table where sat a riotous party of young men. One of the latter, with an oath, reached out and shoved him rudely away. Whereupon the immigrant poured forth such foul vituperation that the young man sprang up and sent him sprawling. A few moments later the Italian struggled to his feet and threw himself savagely upon his assailant, whose back was turned, and plunged a knife blade deep into his side.

It was not the incident *per se* that worried Smith that morning, frequent as such brawls were in his saloons, but the character of the immigrant's victim, who was none other than Frederick Gale, cherished son of the president of the Traders' Bank. For the elder Gale was the Public Welfare League's most prized acquisition, and the effect that this unfortunate affair might produce through him upon the local option campaign was a matter of most serious concern.

When Smith entered the police court he gave an involuntary start. The Italian, stupefied by the coil in which he

had become involved, had sent out an appeal for help, and this had been promptly answered by Alderman McCarty. As Smith drew near, he heard the politician tell the bewildered prisoner that the penitentiary, or worse, doubtless awaited him, but that the alderman was his friend and could save him. It was all a question of dollars. Could the Italian pay? And how much? And then, when the prisoner's excited countrymen swarmed chattering about McCarty and proffered their life-savings, the alderman stepped to the telephone and summoned Royal Denman—who could not have been far away, for he appeared on the scene within five minutes of the call.

But scarcely had Denman arrived when, to the further astonishment of Smith, Dr. Loring and Roger Taft entered the court room. Smith's eyes bulged, and for an instant he thought of flight. But the situation made its demands upon him as chief executive of Filbert, and he quickly quenched the incipient manifestations of perturbation, and bowed coldly to the newcomers.

The hearing, which was brief, did not take place until Denman gave the word, and resulted in remanding the trembling culprit to jail to await the outcome of young Gale's injury. Smith, prompted by Denman, testified that the Italian was blindly intoxicated, but that he had drawn the knife only in self-defense, and that young Gale, confused by drink, had fallen upon it and really inflicted the wound upon himself.

When the hearing closed, the prisoner's friends retained Denman as counsel, and paid him the first installment of his heavy fee. And as they left the court, Smith's watchful eyes did not fail to detect the lawyer in the act of handing a portion of it to McCarty. The incident set him thinking even more seriously.

"I'd like to see you a moment, Smith. Come to my office."

Smith turned sharply, as the whispered words fell upon his ears, and faced Loring. His angry protest against the mention of his own name was not voiced. Something in the doctor's eyes forced an immediate decision to comply

with the request, but he did not speak. And Loring and Taft left the court room almost immediately.

"Them Eye-talians, Y'r Honor, is an easy bunch," commented McCarty, taking Smith's arm as the latter was passing out. "But you've diskivered that in sellin' 'em y'r squirrel whiskey, eh? But tell me now, why in hivin's name was Taft an' Lorin' at th' hearin'?"

"Use your brains, Bill," said Denman, who was following closely. "Taft will be employed by Gale if this case comes to trial in the circuit court. He was taking notes."

"But he want usin' no pencil nor paper—"

"Mental notes, you poor bog-trotter!" was Denman's surly reply. And then the lawyer turned upon Smith. "What did I tell you fellows about running your saloons, Gus? And here you go ruining everything just before the primaries! You seem positively determined to mess the whole thing! I don't care how many murders are committed in your dives after election, but until then there's no excuse for allowing a dirty affair like this to be pulled off—"

But Denman did not conclude his rebuke. Instead, his voice faded away to a fluttering whisper. "Who's that?" he hoarsely demanded, clutching McCarty's arm. "Is it General Diggin?"

"'Tis that," returned McCarty, peering into the hazy distance at an approaching figure.

"I—I don't think I care to meet him," said the lawyer, trying to speak normally, but his voice shaking, despite his efforts at control. "I'll leave you here and go down Fourth Street. See you later, then." With which he turned abruptly and hastened around the corner, followed a moment later by the puffing McCarty.

Smith, left thus unceremoniously alone, continued his way down the street. When he came up with the military figure of General Diggin, moving straight forward, with head erect and shoulders thrown well back, he bowed. The general returned a curt nod, and then halted.

"You understand, sir, from my editorials in last evening's *Budget,* that I am contrasting the principles of

Republicanism with the utter lack of principle in the Democratic party, and not supporting the anti-saloon sentiment, do you not, sir?"

"Certainly," replied Smith, promptly. He had not read a word of the editorials, and had not the slightest notion of the general's meaning.

"I merely wished to make myself clear. Good morning, sir." And the general, setting his ponderous physical machinery again in motion, continued majestically on his way.

Smith turned and stared long at the departing figure. As a commercial salesman he had canvassed the country from end to end, and yet nowhere, it seemed to him, had he met with such odd characters as those with whom Fate had cast his lot in the obscure western town of Filbert. He laughed aloud, despite his uneasiness of mind. Nor did he cease to smile over the odd encounter until he opened the door of Dr. Loring's office a few minutes later.

"Come in," called Loring, noting his visitor. "Sit down." Then, continuing his interrupted conversation: "You can see, Roger, from Denman's conduct this morning in court, how the cheap politician corrupts our immigrants and leads them to conclude that in this country the dollar is almighty, and that with it the politician can influence justice in whichever direction he chooses. The immigrant acquires his ideas of law and justice from such as Denman and McCarty. It is a lamentable fact that most of our immigrants get their first impressions of our laws and institutions from the low politician and the shyster lawyer. And so they come to believe that it is not the commission of crime that gets them into trouble, but, rather, the lack of money to hire the influence that will keep them from the prison or gallows. And so the foreigner who has less money than another from whom he is seeking justice feels that there is no recourse but to take the law into his own hands, if he wants revenge. You see, Roger, my reasons for insisting that the low politician and the shyster lawyer, bred and nourished in the saloon, are the greatest spreaders of anarchy and lawlessness in our country."

He paused and turned and looked steadily at Smith for some time. "I wish," he said, at length, "I wish I didn't have to look at you. But your uncanny resemblance to Schmidt fascinates me. And," he added, turning with a sigh to his desk, "brings up sickening memories.

"Well," he continued, wheeling about again and speaking rapidly, "I must apologize for losing my temper in your office last week. But your stubbornness exasperated me. Mr. Taft and I wish to talk the matter over with you again now, quite dispassionately and only as a question of policy. You refused to leave town when I showed you that your safety was menaced. Will you leave now, if I prove to you that not only you, but the 'wet' cause, will most certainly profit by your departure?"

"I will not!" Smith answered, sharply.

"But," put in Taft, "it is not a matter of principle with you, is it? You do not really think that Filbert is better off with the saloons, and therefore feel that you must remain to lend them your aid, do you?"

"I have my reasons for remaining," Smith returned, with dogged persistence.

"Yes, yes, we know!" Loring exclaimed in impatience. "But we can prove to you irrefutably that your present aims will never be realized."

"The burden of proof is on you, Doctor," said Smith, leaning back in his chair with elaborate carelessness. "And there we will let it remain."

"And are you prepared to face a suit of impeachment for non-enforcement of the Sunday-closing law? This crime was committed at one o'clock in the morning—"

Smith interrupted with a laugh. "Again, Doctor, the burden of proof is on you." His attitude was a curious blending of fear and reckless daring. Finally, after a long silence, he rose, languidly. "If there is nothing further," he said, with a nonchalance which he did not feel, "I will be going—"

Loring motioned him back to his seat. "There is something further," he said, grimly. "Mr. Taft has a letter that may interest you." He turned to the lawyer and nodded slightly.

The latter, visibly nervous, took an envelope from his pocket and drew out the contents. "This was handed to me this morning by my client, Mr. Gale. It is his request that I file suit against you in the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars for conducting the saloon in which his son was assaulted last night."

Again silence engulfed them. And then again Smith burst into an angry laugh. "An excellent bluff!" he retorted. "Fine work! Quite in line with your revealing my identity to Molly Vaughn! Looks as if the time had come for me to do a little revealing, eh?"

"No bluff at all, Mr. Smith, I assure you," said Taft, gravely. "Our superior court has just decided that a saloonkeeper is responsible for a patron who sustains injuries while intoxicated with the liquor purchased in his saloon, and in its decision has awarded the plaintiff heavy damages. This suit against you, if brought to trial, will most certainly be decided in favor of Mr. Gale."

"But," exploded Smith, "you might as well say that the government which licensed the saloonkeeper is responsible too!"

"Yes," Taft replied. "And that is just what is coming. It is only a question of time."

"And, more," chimed in Loring, "the voters whose votes sustain the principle of license will some day be held responsible in such cases also."

Loring and Taft sat eying Smith closely, while the latter struggled to hold his temper in leash. Then Smith laughed again, this time a nervous, mirthless laugh.

"This reminds me," he said, irrelevantly, "of our session here three weeks ago. Lord! what a lot has been crowded into three short weeks." Then, noting that his companions remained grimly silent:

"I suppose if I leave town this suit will not be filed—is that the correct inference?" he asked, sarcastically.

"It will not be filed by Mr. Taft, at least," Loring replied.

"Then file it and be damned!" cried Smith, springing from his chair, purple with rage. "You'll find my lawyer a match for your sleepy wits—"

"If you were awake yourself," quietly interrupted Loring, "I think you would find that your lawyer has already matched your own wits."

"How's that?" demanded Smith, trembling with rage.

"My friend," Loring went on, "Royal Denman has you in the hollow of his hand, and is only biding his own good time to crush you. Did you think, poor fool! that you could remain in Filbert, with your identity hidden, and quietly acquire a fortune in a few weeks by the easy sacrifice of a helpless woman like Molly Vaughn? I take it you haven't learned her philosophy yet, that 'evil is a suicide,' have you?"

"Molly Vaughn!" Smith repeated.

"Yes, my misguided friend," continued Loring. "Were you not to take little Karl from her to-day, despite my warning to keep your whiskey-stained hands from that child?"

Smith held himself. Again, after a strained pause, he took refuge in a curt laugh.

"It is a joke, isn't it?" said the doctor. And then, to Smith's great amazement, he too burst into a loud laugh. "It's another of whiskey's brilliant jokes on Molly! Did she ever tell you about the others? Well, one of the best was about her brothers. Ha! ha! I never can keep from laughing when I tell it. One day, when they lived in the country, her two brothers drove to town. It was a bitter winter day, and, before returning, they went to Schmidt's saloons and filled up on his 'squirrel' whiskey. Oh, it was funny! They drank until they were simply idiotic; and then they started home. One of the brothers was so intoxicated that he fell out of the carriage; but the other brother was so idiotically drunk that he thought it funny, and didn't try to help his brother back, but kept on driving. And—this is an absurdly comical part of the story—the brother who fell out of the carriage lay in an alcoholic stupor and slowly froze to death. It was a splendid joke on Molly, wasn't it? And such a jolly time as she had when she went out and found him frozen stiff. Oh, it was uproariously funny! But the funniest time of all was when the sur-

viving brother got drunk again and crawled into the stable to sleep off his stupor and had his pickled brains trampled out by the horses. It was all in the good cause of 'personal liberty' and 'vested rights' and a lot more of that funny anarchistic stuff that the dive keepers offer in support of their beautiful and holy traffic. But the very funniest joke on poor Molly Vaughn is the one you are going to play when you take little Karl from her—"

His face darkened, and he rose abruptly and came to where Smith stood.

"It was funny, too—that is, to Schwartz, Denman, and Schmidt—the easy way in which they squeezed old Pierre Vaughn out and stole his business; it was very funny, the way those scoundrels drove him to his death, and then hoodwinked Gale and the rest of us into believing that there was nothing left of his estate—

"But I am wasting time with you! You are still blindly grasping at moonbeams, and refuse to be persuaded. I wash my hands of you now. Go!"

Smith backed away. "And what about Gale's suit?" he asked, with a mocking grin.

"That," replied Loring, "rests with Royal Denman."

"Denman, eh? Always Denman! And why with him, may I ask?"

"Because, my blinded friend, he knows that you are *not* August Schmidt."

The doctor went rapidly to the door and opened it, then stood aside until the dazed Smith had passed silently out.

CHAPTER 24

THE early twilight, trailing its dank mantle over shivering Filbert, enveloped the mayor in shadows less funereal than the clouds of lugubrious speculation in which he sat immersed at his desk in the city hall. He had gone to his rooms the preceding afternoon, following his encounter with Taft and Loring, with fear gripping his heart. But fear had given place to doubt, and doubt to

rage; then fear returned to occupy again the field. Was he about to walk into a trap of Denman's devising? Or did Taft and Loring dissemble, and should he "call" them?—perhaps to pull the maze down about his own throbbing head!

Slowly and with sedulous care he had canvassed again the situation. Yet, delve as he might into his turbulent thought, he could touch but one solid conclusion, namely, that he was at last isolated and encompassed with the gravest dangers.

The thought threw him into a panic. He sprang to his feet, determined to leave Filbert on the next train. He would call up Loring—! But shame intervened to prevent him from funking out of a situation which he had himself created, despite the doctor's repeated warnings. He had turned from the telephone and thrown himself upon his bed; only to rise again immediately, with delirious brain, and pace the room like a trapped animal.

And then he had stopped short, and his face had seemed to stiffen and grow cold. What was it Loring said? *"Keep your whiskey-stained hands from that child!"* Smith's blood boiled anew at the insult! Why had he not denounced the doctor as himself an arrant coward for so treacherously betraying him to Molly Vaughn? Why had he refrained from knocking him down then and there? And in permitting Loring's defiance and Molly Vaughn's knowledge of the mayor's identity to restrain him, was he not indeed doubly a coward? Did Denman really know that he was not Schmidt—?

He would soon learn. And, obstinately setting his teeth, he had, a moment later, boldly summoned Denman to a conference. "The topics to be discussed?" the surprised lawyer had asked. Why—the campaign, of course—the affair of last night—and, well, his—that is, Molly Vaughn's —child, for, he said, he had been considering the advisability of some arrangement whereby—

And the lawyer had come, with a smirk of satisfaction on his cadaverous face; and when he departed, still wearing the smirk, had proceeded at once—although Smith knew

it not—to the Schwartz home, to convey to Miss Greta the welcome report that the mayor had complied with her wish and had arranged for the immediate removal of little Karl to the orphanage.

Smith's head sank deeper into his chest, as he sat with hands thrust into his pockets and legs extended beneath his desk. He was waiting—although he knew not definitely for what. And then it came, a message from the Sister Superior of St. Catherine's. Little Karl was enrolled as a ward of the institution.

Smith rose from his desk, scarlet with shame, and slunk like a whipped cur from the room.

* * * * * *

"The best thing that could have happened, Roger!" cried Loring, bending over his dejected friend, as they sat closeted in the latter's office, and slapping him heartily upon the back. "Smith is a rare psychological study. The more I observe him, the more profoundly impressed I become with certain ideas which have suggested themselves to me insistently of late. Keep up your courage, Roger, we—"

But Taft shook his head. "No," he interrupted, dolefully. "I can't share your optimism. Denman himself had Schmidt's body removed from your vault, and at the last moment he will spring his trap, and we shall find ourselves caught. It will be his revenge upon you and me—the defeat of the local option cause—the supreme triumph of his own diabolical cunning. I can't stand it much longer, Loring. I am slowly going mad."

"But, Roger," persisted the doctor, "we have taken every trick in the game so far!"

"Can you meet his ultimate claim that Smith is not Schmidt?"

"He doesn't know that."

"But you told Smith so yesterday—"

"Only to frighten him into entangling himself more inextricably with Denman. Why? Roger—"

He bent again over the lawyer and laid a hand upon his shoulder. His voice had sunk to a tense whisper.

"—I suspect something. I cannot explain now—it

would seem to you wildly impossible—but I am becoming more firmly convinced of it every day. Wait; give me a little more time; and for God's sake, Roger, hang onto yourself!"

* * * * * *

When Smith entered his upper Main Street saloon, just before the supper hour, he collided with a slender, well dressed young man who was being led out by Dr. Voss.

"Careless devil!" the young man muttered, recovering his equilibrium with difficulty, and awkwardly rearranging his disordered hat.

A hot retort sprang to Smith's lips, but he checked it and passed on and up to the bar.

"Who's the drunk that Voss was taking out?" he demanded of one of his bartenders.

"Drunk? Why, Voss went out with Blind Billy," answered the perplexed bartender.

Smith discreetly kept silence. A moment later Voss returned.

"Handed Billy over to his wife," he remarked. "Poor girl! I'm sure sorry for her. Ain't it a dog's life she leads? *Himmel!*"

Smith stood consuming with a curiosity that he dared not voice. But Voss, rendered talkative by his regular afternoon's potation, three consecutive glasses of beer, supplied the paucity of information.

"There's my strongest argument against whiskey, and why I don't touch the stuff," he continued, leaning against the bar. "*Mein Gott!* Poor Billy's optic nerves is all withered up—can't see a ray of light, and never will! And whiskey's at the bottom of it all!

"The trouble is," he rambled on, "too much alcohol makes a fellow awfully liable to yield to temptations, when otherwise he could stand against 'em. I just read a medical report that says out of several thousand cases of venereal disease, it was found that about eighty per cent of 'em was contracted while the patient was under the influence of alcohol. It's whiskey what does it, August! And, what's more, we doctors can't do much for a sick man that's been a drinker.

Take George Baldwin, for example. I doctored him when he had a stroke—but, *Himmel!* his system was so pickled in alcohol that the most powerful remedies were neutralized, and I couldn't do a thing. I tell you, a fellow should drink only beer, and that in moderate amounts. August, you should sell only beer."

Smith turned away without replying. Must he always hear these loathsome tales of the ravages of the traffic in which he was engaged! He could have throttled Voss!

An hour later Smith had eaten his supper in solitude in the Bulwer House and had gone to his second saloon to check up the day's receipts. It was Monday evening, and business was quiet. And he was secretly glad it was so, for he was eager to call on Greta Schwartz and claim his reward for so promptly meeting her wish in regard to the Vaughn child. But the ugly story of Blind Billy haunted him, like a ghost that would not down.

At eight o'clock, as Smith was preparing to leave, a flashily-dressed youth emerged from the rear room and came quickly up to the bar. Smith appraised him at a glance.

"Listen, cull," said the young man, leaning over the bar and addressing the bartender. "I got a peach back here, a regular lulu! Gimme a couple lemon sours. Make 'em easy, these first."

Smith drew nearer. "What's her name?" he asked abruptly.

"Dunno," said the young man, turning to him with a broad grin. "Says for me to call her Mary."

"How did you get her to come in here?" continued Smith, in a cold tone.

"Why," returned the young man, "dead easy! I been watching her on the street some time, and yesterday I makes up my mind I can land her. So I goes up to her standing on a corner and says: 'Hello, well, I'll bet you forgot me already.' And I see she's fell for the gaff, and I goes on: 'Grace—remember her?—she's disappointed me, and I got a couple of tickets to the show to-night, and—say, don't you want to go with me?' Well, she goes. That's last night. But she makes me leave her on a corner after the show, and

goes home alone. And to-day I sees her again on Main Street, and I goes up and says: 'Have you seen the bill they're goin' to have at the Mammoth to-night?' And she ain't, and so I makes a date to meet her on the corner of Main and Wheeler, and says first we'll have a soda or lemonade, and I brings her in the side door here. She don't know this is a pub."

He took up the drinks which the bartender had mixed and started for the rear room. Smith stopped him with a rough command.

"What's your game?"

"Eh?" said the youth. "Why, Belle Glover's going to ship her to Chicago. She's a prize! She'll fall asleep when she gets a few of these; and I've got a taxi coming in half an hour. Here's your coin," he added, throwing a half dollar upon the bar.

Smith stood rooted to the spot. Something seemed to be slowly awaking within him. It might have been the listless stir of a half-smothered moral conscience. He was aroused by his bartender's casual comment:

"I guess she's seen her mother for the last time."

Smith came to himself with a start, just as the youth returned with the empty glasses.

"Make 'em stiffer this time, cull. Why don't you keep absinthe? That's the dope that lands 'em—What th' hell—!"

Smith had shot out a long arm and seized the young man's collar with the grip of a vise and a quick, twisting motion that lifted him bodily from the floor. A moment later the frightened youth had been thrust from the front door of the saloon into Main Street with such vigor that he whirled like a spinning top and fell with a crash into the gutter. Then Smith, with eyes blazing, stalked back through the saloon, past the stupefied bartender, and into the rear room. A fair girl, little more than a child, sat alone at one of the small tables, waiting. Smith laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Who are you?"

The frightened girl gasped, and tried to rise. Smith held her firmly.

"Your name, or you spend the night in jail—take your choice."

She burst into tears. They had not been far distant, he thought. "Florence Willard," she sobbed.

Smith seized her arm and thrust her ahead of him through the door. A taxicab had just drawn up. Into it he pushed the weeping girl, and followed.

"Your father's name?" he demanded.

"Dr. Willard," the terrified child moaned, shrinking into a corner.

They continued in silence. A few minutes later Smith shoved the girl into the arms of the astonished woman who had hurried to answer his prolonged ring.

"The liquor business, ma'am," he said, coldly, "will be less profitable when you mothers cease to coöperate with us saloonkeepers." With which he turned away and strode down the street.

* * * * * *

Smith's thought was in a state of chaos as he pursued his way toward the Schwartz mansion. Twice he resolved to defer his call until he had regained his composure; but each time the prod of mingled fear and wordly ambition held him on his way. When at length the door closed behind him, and he faced the enigmatical looks of Miss Greta, he knew that an error had somewhere crept into his intricate calculations.

His stumbling announcement of little Karl's disposal was coolly received. Mr. Denman had already informed her—she said it with a strange light in her eyes.

Smith's face darkened. She noted it—and shrugged her ample shoulders. That was but the first step, she informed him. Had he devised a means as yet of removing Caroline Hazard? No? And she still awaited a satisfactory explanation of his absence from Filbert on the night of his "accident." What inference must she draw from Belle Glover's dark insinuation? And then—a quite different, though vastly more important matter—had he seen her father in regard to the business?

"Because, August," she explained, casually, "he has read

Mr. Denman's report, and he wants to talk with you about it."

"That report is not correct," Smith hazarded, desperately.

"We hope not, August," she replied. "But papa says he must go over it with you."

Smith felt himself growing cold. "I will see him," he answered, feebly. "The business is good."

"Yes, now," she sharply returned. "But if the 'drys' are going to win, papa says the business must be sold at once."

Smith forced a laugh. "I am willing," he said.

"Yes, but—a forced sale, August, under mortgage—"

Smith ventured all on a sudden impulse. He rose and came quickly to where she sat and took her hand. "I shall have *you* left, at any rate—shall I not?" he said, gently, and with an assumption of tenderness which he did not feel.

She quietly withdrew her hand. "Papa says we must wait, August."

"How long?" he demanded, his tone hardening.

"At least until after the election," she replied, looking up at him slowly.

"But you said it should be the first of March if I took little Karl—"

She smiled and shook her head. "There are other things, August," she said. "You have not been the same since your accident, you know. Dr. Voss says you have not recovered yet, and—"

Smith saw the golden bauble slipping from his fingers. He clutched desperately after it. Again he seized her hand. "Greta, you are not going to—"

"We must wait, August."

Fear and anger surged over him; and then the flood receded and left him shivering. Again she laughed quietly up into his face. The mockery of it drove him frantic. He dropped her hand and planted himself squarely in front of her. It was the reckless daring of despair.

"You will become my wife on the first of March," he exclaimed, in a voice shaking with passion, "or not at all!"

She stared at him blankly for a moment. Then she rose from her chair and drew herself up stiffly.

"*Doch, August!* I would have you know that I shall *never* marry a madman! *Und Du bist verricht—ganz und gar!* Then it shall be not at all!"

She drew a ring from her finger and thrust it into his hand. Then she swept imperiously from the room, leaving him staring dully at the ashes of his blasted hopes.

* * * * * *

It was still early when Smith groped his way down the Schwartz steps and into the cheerless street. His brow was wet and his whole body trembled. Nausea, manifesting his conviction of utter defeat, lay upon him, and giddiness forced him to lean heavily for a moment against a tree. With his sense of direction wholly awry, he plunged from one street into another. Once, lifting his straining eyes from the pavement, he caught a feeble gleam from the window of a lowly dwelling and recognized the home of Molly Vaughn. He stopped short and clutched the rickety fence to steady himself. And he stared at the slender figure, bending over her sewing, until the world about him melted into a gray haze and the light was quenched. With a malediction upon his own baseness, he turned away.

At midnight he entered his lower Main Street saloon. The pungent smell of liquor again turned his stomach. The place seemed to have taken on an aspect indescribably vile since he was last there. Fetid, rotting hulks of humanity drooped over the reeking tables, or lay huddled on the filthy floor about the glowing stove. Several wretched creatures sat tipped back against the wall, asleep and snoring loudly, their dirty faces black with flies. At one corner of the bar a crowd had gathered, and from it rose loud, excited voices. Smith thrust himself into the mass. A human form stood propped against the bar. And at the sight of it Smith's blood froze.

"It's Tim Jordan!" the bartender whispered, excitedly. "He's goin' into th' D. T's! Gawd—look at him!"

Jordan's drawn face was ashen; his drooling mouth twitched convulsively; his red eyes blazed in violent contrast to his dead, sunken cheeks. Suddenly his roving glance flew to a corner of the room, and he jumped back with a

loud yell and a look of such horror upon his face that the crowd broke and scattered. Smith alone remained near him, fascinated by the horror of it all.

"See 'em!" shrieked the poor wretch, thrusting his shaking arms before him. Then his voice broke and sank to a hoarse, guttural whisper. "Holy Mary! See 'em! It's th' rats! They're comin' again! My God!"

Perspiration broke out upon him in myriad streams and ran in dank furrows through the gray stubble that covered his cavernous cheeks. A violent fit of coughing seized him. He clutched fiercely at his vitals; then sank moaning to the floor.

Smith turned wildly to the horror-stricken spectators. "Call a doctor!" he cried. "You, George!" shouting to his bartender.

"Which one, Mr. Schmidt?" asked the employe, starting toward the telephone.

"Loring!"

Wholly unaware of the name he had given, his thought held by the horrid excitement of the awful situation, Smith lifted the writhing body of the stricken wretch and bore it to a billiard table.

"He's been acting strange for some days, Mr. Schmidt," volunteered the awed bartender, returning from the telephone. "Thought his innards were being eaten by rats—said he could feel 'em gnawin' inside him every once in a while. He'd been hittin' the hard stuff a long time; but the taste left him, and he ain't been eatin' nor sleepin'—"

A sudden spasm seized Jordan and forced from his bloodless lips the most frightful yells. Men rushed in from the street. Some one summoned the patrol wagon, which tore clanging down the street a few minutes later, pursued by a constantly swelling mob. In the midst of the hubbub Dr. Loring appeared on the scene. Four men were then holding Jordan to the table.

Loring turned to Smith, after a cursory examination of the sufferer. "Well?" he commented. "What are you going to do with him? He's yours, you know."

"Get him home!" exclaimed Smith, excitedly. "You officers—"

"He ain't got no home, Y'r Honor," said one of the policemen.

"To the hospital, then!"

"They will not take him in his present condition," replied Loring, gravely.

"But—" Smith was desperate "—what shall we do?"

"He's yours, you know," Loring reiterated, in a low tone.

Smith turned fiercely upon the doctor. "Then, by heaven! we'll take him to my rooms," he shouted. "You men, out to the wagon with him!"

A smile flitted across Loring's face as he climbed into the police wagon to accompany the odd party to the mayor's rooms.

CHAPTER 25

ONCE again was Filbert agog. And among the "wets" consternation ran rampant. Again and again that week, Denman, masking his real convictions, carefully detailed his explanation of the mayor's conduct to the anxious Moller and McCarty and the host of lesser luminaries of the liquor party.

"He had forbidden Jordan to enter his saloons, I tell you," he said, for the thousandth time. "But Jordan, knowing that he was coming down with the tremens, sneaked in there out of sheer revenge on Gus for throwing him out not long ago. But, after what I said about you saloonkeepers running your places respectably, what else could Gus do but act square with Jordan? It'll make votes for us, I tell you, if you fellows will smooth out your faces and spread the explanation I'm giving you."

"Well—I dunno," McCarty dubiously commented, as he scratched his smooth, bald pate. "Gus is a clever lad—I always said that—but he's wid Loring, an'—"

"Bill, use your brains!" exclaimed the attorney, impatiently. "It's conciliation—smooth diplomacy on Gus's part. He did the same when he had his accident, you remember."

"Con-silly-ashun! Arra, thin, y'r highfalootin' words would bust me jaw! But, look ye, th' primaries is Tuesday nixt, an' Gus ain't said a mouthful o' words to us this whole blessed week, an' here it be Friday! There he's set, up in his rooms, wid Loring an' that old divvil howlin' wid th' snakes, whilst we bust our galluses skirmishin' around to inflooence th' vote th' right way! It looks bad, I say, an' in particular to th' hellions o' Terry Road."

"Eh? Well," snarled Denman, his dark, foreboding expression indicating his own apprehension, "it's for a purpose, I tell you. It's to throw dust in the eyes of the 'drys'."

"May be, may be," was the alderman's laconic reply. "An' is it con-silly-ashun what sends him to Chicago this night wid Loring?"

Denman gave a little gasp and sprang to his feet. "What do you mean, Bill?"

McCarty nodded sententiously. "His Honor takes a bit av a trip to th' mee-trop-olis to-night. An', if I ain't mistaken, their train's gone a'ready. 'Twas Mulligan what put me wise."

It was as McCarty had said. The leader of the "drys" and the titular captain of the "wet" forces were well on their way together to the great city when Denman hurried into the council chambers and shook the somnolent Mulligan into a recollection of the bizarre fact, and of his own forgotten intention to report it to the now thoroughly exasperated lawyer. And Denman's anger was in no degree mollified by the clerk's insistent declaration that the mayor had left no explanation of his abrupt departure from Filbert.

Strive as he might, Denman could outline no acceptable reasons for the mayor's odd conduct. He had seen him but twice since Monday evening; had conversed with him but a probable scant half hour. McCarty's experience had been similar. Moller had not seen him at all. That Loring had spent many hours alone with Schmidt since Monday night, Denman of course knew, as did all Filbert, for the circumstances of Jordan's case rendered this quite unavoidable. But of what had passed between the shrewd physician and Filbert's eccentric chief executive, Denman could learn

nothing. He had no means of knowing that Smith, staring in wide-eyed horror at the writhing, shrieking Jordan, had seen visions that week that curdled his blood. He could not know that when Loring reiterated: "He's yours, you know," the Lure guttered like a candle in its socket before Smith's straining eyes, and after each repetition shone again with a feeble glow that was scarce visible.

For three days Jordan lay on the mayor's bed, with the gigantic rats of his diseased, alcoholic imagination tearing his vitals. For brief intervals these hideous creatures would slink away into the black shadows, and the wretched sufferer would fall into a coma of utter exhaustion—only to rouse in pitiable horror and beg his attendants to kill the huge toads that were hopping upon him, or the hissing serpents that drooped from the posts of the bed. And then his cries would suddenly give place to horrid guttural sounds, for the rats were returning; and Smith and Loring knew that they must again throw themselves upon the twisted, tortured, naked form and hold it to the bed until the terrible rodents ceased to gnaw his half-consumed bowels. To Smith, that room became a chamber of horrors. The awfulness of the scenes enacted before him etched his soul with lines that he knew would never be effaced. His aching ears rang with the frenzied shrieks and despairing moans of the deluded victim of "personal liberty." He too began to visualize the gila monsters, the lizards, scorpions, and foul creeping things that emerged from the seething chambers of diseased imagination and made their slimy trails across the trembling body before him. These hideous creatures typified to him the brewers, distillers, and saloonkeepers who, under governmental protection, battened upon the manhood of a nation. And when the distorted faces grimaced from the walls and ceiling at the affrighted sufferer, Smith too would recoil in horror, with beaded drops of perspiration on his brow, with limbs atremble, and then rush wildly from the room. It seemed to him he must go mad to remain another hour in that frightful environment.

"He's coming through," Loring said at midnight Thursday, as he tenderly raised the lids from the bloody, protrud-

ing eyeballs of the now quiet man. "The paroxysms are growing less frequent. He thinks he is stone blind now, although this morning all sorts of colored lights were shooting before his bleared eyes."

"And—he will live—after all he has been through?" asked Smith, in a whisper of awe.

"Probably for a while—and yet he were better dead now, for, unless I greatly mistake, he is manifesting symptoms of wet brain," replied the doctor, sadly. "Records show that only one person in four ever recovers from that."

Smith bent over the motionless figure. "Wet brain!" he echoed.

"He still has delusions," the doctor continued; "but you notice that the abject horror and wild fear have diminished. He now lies in a stupor, muttering a little, but seldom opening his eyes. His muscles have been slowly stiffening. Notice how sensitive his skin is, for when I pinch it he tries to draw away, but without waking. He will lie in this quiet stupor for several weeks, probably."

"And—then?"

"Pass quietly away—it may be with pneumonia, or kidney disease. In any event, he is doomed, and there is nothing further to do but have him removed to the hospital to await the end, which will certainly come shortly. The ringing of the cash-register in your saloons, my friend, was his death knell. Poor devil!"

Smith did not reply, but turned and sat down by the bed, where he remained staring at the thing that the doctor had said was his. Loring, meanwhile, called up the hospital and at length arranged to have the sick man removed at once. Then he returned to where Smith sat.

"He is going the way thousands have gone before," he said, gently laying a hand on Smith's shoulder. "And nobody cares. What is it to us? We must not interfere with the 'personal liberty' of a free-born American citizen! Besides, the government revenues must be kept up. Congress must have its 'pork'."

Smith raised his haggard face. "Doctor," he whispered, "is there no cure for liquor?"

Loring shrugged his shoulders. "For the liquor *business,* yes; for the liquor *habit,* no—not until it becomes accepted for what it really is, a disease, the outward manifestation of a mesmerized mind. For only mesmerism could induce men to swallow the poisonous offal of foul germs, knowing that this," pointing to the quiet body, "awaits them."

"But, Doctor, he is the victim of whiskey. If he had drunk only beer—in moderation—" But the specious reasoning of Dr. Voss was likewise failing him.

"Beer!" echoed Loring, his lips curling with scorn. "Bah! Why, beer is demonstrably doing more damage to the human race than all other liquors! Oh, yes, I know, you fellows point to its low alcoholic content. And so you make it appeal to the man who would not for the world be considered intemperate. I know all about that!

"Listen," he continued, emphasizing his remarks with frequent gestures, "beer contains matter extracted from hops, together with sugar, gluten, alcohol and small quantities of other ingredients. The diuretic properties of the hops send the alcohol straight to the kidneys, where its destructive effects are appalling! Probably more than ninety-five out of every hundred cases of Bright's disease can be traced to the drinking of beer. Besides this, beer causes deposits of morbid fat throughout the body, particularly around the heart. It enlarges the heart itself, and greatly increases the work that organ has to do. You may see this manifested in the shortness of breath of beer-drinkers, and their great susceptibility to fatigue. As to the brain, well, more than half the inmates of asylums are there because of alcohol. And the effect on children—good heavens! Why, parental alcoholism is unquestionably the greatest destroyer of children known to *materia medica!* If you want statistics on these points I can produce volumes of them!"

"But why, knowing all this, do men continue to drink?"

"The mystery of mankind's desire for alcohol—ah, you might have learned something about that had you treated Molly Vaughn like a human being. I can tell you little. But it originates in the so-called human mind; and there it must be handled. Drug prescriptions will not touch it.

As the novelist Chambers says, the only excuse for swallowing alcohol is 'morbid predisposition or self-inculcated inclination.' And these causes of alcoholism, my friend, are wholly within the mental realm, and there must be met and mastered. Beer is not a food, in any sense of the word. Man would survive on it alone but a short time. It is not even a cooling beverage, for the alcohol and solids in the beer burn, causing an increase in bodily heat. Beer causes more sunstroke than the sun itself! Beer, I tell you again, is but mesmerism, insidious, degenerative, and damnable. Molly Vaughn could have told you that and—"

Smith rose wearily. For a moment he stood looking at the figure on the bed, then he turned to Loring. There was a strange light in his eyes. "Doctor," he said, in a tremulous voice, "I—I feel as if I were—"

"You need a change," said Loring, quickly. "The strain has been too much for you. I have business in Chicago to-morrow. What do you say to going with me? We can return Monday."

Smith seemed to reflect for some time. Then he raised his eyes to Loring's. "I'll go," he said, "if you think best. But I must be back here—"

The doctor nodded, with a faint smile at the corners of his mouth. It was a smile of satisfaction with the working out of his well-drawn plans.

And thus it was that from the depot that evening Smith telephoned to the slow-witted Mulligan the announcement of his unexpected departure from the city for a day or two.

CHAPTER 26

THROUGHOUT the monotonous journey to the great city, Smith dozed fitfully. With his unhindered departure from Filbert accomplished, his taut nerves had at once begun to relax. And the reaction continued, until he was left utterly exhausted. When the train pulled into the huge station, amid flaring lights and noise and confusion, Loring was obliged to assist his drooping companion out to a cab.

Smith felt that, had Loring been leading him to the gallows then, he could not have resisted, so great was the apathy that lay upon his tired brain.

It had not occurred to him to inquire into Loring's motive for this journey to Chicago. Indeed, Smith felt that, to a great extent, the inciting cause lay within himself; for, as he dully watched the hospital attendants remove the ghastly human wreck from his rooms that afternoon, he knew that Loring was studying him, with a keen appreciation of the terrible strain that he was enduring and the necessity of prompt action.

Smith had been deeply grateful for the silence which the doctor kept on the train; but his gratitude was swallowed up in resentment when, after supper served in their rooms, Loring had checked him as he was about to throw himself upon the bed for the rest which he so greatly needed.

"Not yet, my friend," said the doctor, firmly grasping Smith's arm. "We have work to do to-night." And, heedless of protest and expostulation, Loring urged him forth. "If what I would do cannot be done to-night, then it cannot be done at all," the doctor muttered, as they left the room. And as he listened, Smith felt his resentment slowly sink into the depths of a new wonder.

In the lobby Loring stepped to the desk and spoke with the clerk. The latter turned and gave an order, which resulted in the appearance of two men, tall, well built, and plainly dressed. They approached and greeted the doctor, who, in turn, presented them to Smith, adding:

"Mr. Smith is a prominent brewer and saloonkeeper."

Smith's eyes flashed with sudden anger. He knew Loring had not said this without a purpose. And yet it was true; the opprobrious title was his, despise it as he might. But he kept silence. And a few minutes later he was shivering through the chill night air in the cañon-like streets, vaguely wondering what would be the next cast of Fate's dice. He could not know that, in the weeks following—weeks packed with feverish activity consequent upon a resolution that until to-night he could not have imagined himself making—he would live over daily, almost hourly, the scenes amid

which Loring was about to lead him in the dim underworld of the great city, where the putrescent cancer of civilization strikes deep its foul roots.

From the luxurious hotel they plunged precipitately into the mephitic cesspools of Halsted, West Madison, and State Streets, and mingled with the countless throngs of human shades gliding like fetid vapors along the alcoholic highway toward the darkness. Vice, filth, squalor dripped upon them, like thick, green slime from the reeking archways of the city's sewers. Disease smeared their garments; poverty and degradation blew their rotting breath upon them like the sickening odors of putrid flesh from crumbling tombs. Death mocked them with hideous leers and insane grimaces. Smith paled and sickened. Loring watched him narrowly, but said little.

From place to place Smith followed the doctor and his two saturnine companions: from the palatial bars of the great hotels to the "fashionable" saloons, and from these to the "respectable" middle class of drinking resorts; then down, step by step, to the "snake-holes," the "pubs," the cheap saloon with its whiskey-poison at ten cents straight, on down, down, down, to the groggery, the beer cellar, the cave, the dive—and then, when it seemed they could sink no deeper, a final descent and a halt at the lowest point of the alcoholic trail of death, the "barrel house," at the edge of the precipice over which the foul stream of maudlin, tattered, crazed derelicts plunges into the morgue.

Smith's eyes burned, his sight wavered, his brain reeled as he stared at the dance of death that keeps the coffers of a Christian nation filled in this twentieth century. But should not the saloonkeeper regard his satanic traffic as legitimate as long as the municipality legalizes it? Dare we interfere with the "personal liberty" of the man who chooses to stagger to hell along the slippery road which his government prepares for him? Ah, these evil-smelling, blear-eyed, foul-tongued wretches, hobbling to their dank sepulchers with the support of their government—these gross-featured, rag-clad, diseased and cursing mendicants—should we not open wide our arms and take them with their filth to our

bosoms? For they are ours; they have yielded their lives to protect our "vested rights," our "legitimate traffic which must not be crushed," lest the revenue of the country fail! And these thousands of shame-covered, cringing girls, thrown into the dirty cells of our jails with last night's catch of humanity's dregs, were they not seeking amusement where the lights glitter and the low, soft music lulls and invites, in the spider-looms protected by their paternal government? Smith saw that night the black horror of the traffic in human souls—and the sight branded his memory with scars that would endure for all time. From place to place he dully followed his grim, silent companions, through countless swinging doors that led from bars into hot, fetid, reeking dens beyond, where lurid creatures—women once—half nude and maudlin, grimaced, urged and beckoned from behind cosmetic masks; where men, thin, emasculated leeches or vicious-featured slavers, plied their hellish trade. Often the nature of his environment ceased to make its impress upon his tortured thought; often he realized with a start that he was in the jostling swarm of a public dance hall, mingling with procurers and panderers, now staring at drunken girls led screaming from the room, now gazing with scarce-seeing eyes at tender youths huddled in drunken stupor upon the dirty floor. His ears throbbed dully, and he faintly heard the low-voiced words of Loring:

"It has been said that 'alcohol is the indispensable vehicle of the white slaver.' That without it his fiendish business must cease to endure. Are you convinced of this—or shall I take you further?"

Smith slowly turned his horror-filled gaze upon the doctor, but did not speak.

"A report has just been rendered," the latter said, "showing that during the past six months some fifty-three girls went to the operating table of the county hospital, suffering from social diseases due to their visits to these accursed dance halls. It is always the same sad story: the human desire for pleasure or forgetfulness; a man who offers it in drink, dance, and song—and then the hospital, where, records show, four hundred illegitimate babes are brought

into the world every year. My friend, had we the time, I would take you into every one of five hundred saloons here—they are crowded close on but three or four streets—which, to my certain knowledge, contribute to the delinquency of five million girls annually, through the agency of alcohol, and where she who enters returns not until the brand of disease or disgrace is burned deep into her soul. And then I would ask you again: Is the influence of the saloon on the welfare of a Christian community sufficiently beneficial to justify its continuance?"

In a low groggery, which they entered from an alley, though Smith knew not how they obtained entrance, nor when, one of Loring's companions pointed out a ragged figure crumpled upon an empty beer keg.

"He was a judge, years ago," he said, in a low tone. "I have taken criminals into his court."

He went up to the sodden wretch and laid a hand upon his shoulder. "Wake up, Judge!" he called, shaking him vigorously. "Don't you know me?"

The maudlin creature slowly raised a pair of bloodshot eyes. From somewhere among the dirty rags a trembling hand stole out and a rasping wheeze arose. "Slip me a jitney, for God's sake! I'm dying!"

At a sign from Loring a generous glass of whiskey was brought, which the palsied victim swallowed in a gulp. A fit of trembling then seized him, from which he roused sluggishly and began to pluck at his coat sleeve and nervously arrange his filthy attire.

A shiver of emotion went through Smith as he gazed upon the most pitiable object of despair, misery, and utter degradation that he had ever beheld. "Did you say," he asked in a whisper, "that he—that he was a judge?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I watched him go down, step by step. He started in the respectable places, the clubs and 'snake holes.' It took just ten years of hell to land him here. The barrel house is now the only place that will tolerate him. This is his last stop before he slips into a drunkard's grave."

"And he is now the saloonkeeper's finished product," commented Loring.

Smith turned away and drew a long breath. His eyes roved mechanically about the low haunt, and as they slowly took in the features of the scene a sense of inexpressible horror came over him.

"The barrel house," he heard Loring say, "represents the lowest depths touched by that lowest of human institutions, the saloon. The wet trail stops here, for beyond is black death."

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Smith was becoming aware of the transformation taking place deep within him, of a something that seemed to be struggling into life in the atmosphere of death that lay over these terrible haunts. He had lost all sense of time and place while he feverishly watched the gloomy, endless stream of vagabonds creeping through these hell-holes. Many of the wretched beings now begging piteously for whiskey were in the evening of life, broken, crippled, twisted and misshapen with loathsome disease, with mind and memory now a blank. They were already dead—and they knew it and eagerly awaited the snapping of the frayed thread that held them to a semblance of life.

"They're yours, you know," he heard Loring say. And he turned upon the doctor in fury. But shame smote him, and, with an immense effort, he controlled himself. He knew that he had already begun, as once did these soul-hardened saloonkeepers, and that it was but a calculable matter of time when the same fell spirit of commercialism would smother his moral sense and leave him as utterly barren as they. The thought leaped through his brain like a forked tongue of flame.

"Come up and I'll introduce you to the proprietor, Mr. Smith," he heard one of his companions say. He could not refuse; but he shuddered when the fat palm closed over his, and the man's proffer of good fellowship fell upon his tingling ears. Smith knew it was artificial—knew that this low-browed creature was a parasite who would suck his blood from his pulsing veins with the same cruel gusto and lack of sympathy that he bestowed upon the dried human carcasses strewn about his foul cave. Smith knew that this

man was an assassin; knew that he himself was an assassin of the same fell type, a vampire that battened upon rotting human souls. And yet it was this sort of thing that he was supporting in his contention for "personal liberty," for "license," and "the rights of man." He was a partner in this devilish business and all its hideous consequences. He had clamored loudly for "compensation"—and Loring's words were again echoing in his ears:

"Compensation! Why should we compensate you? Do we take anything from you? No; we but refuse to renew your license to conduct a hell on earth and ruin manhood—a license which, you well knew, lived but from year to year!"

Compensation! Reimbursement of the saloonkeeper, in case the traffic were suppressed! And can the murderer, the assassin, the poisoner demand reimbursement for the life he forfeits to the State? Can the low-browed criminal parasites who conduct these soul-damning dives reimburse the hosts of mumbling, babbling human hulks for the lives drowned in their satanic poisons?

Yes, let us "compensate" them. But only in divine justice, when they, the outlawed brewers, distillers, and tapsters have first given back the human lives they have destroyed and damned; when they have paid for the hideous diseases, the shocking accidents, the pitiable deformities of body and mind that their awful business has produced; when they have restored the purity of girlhood, the chastity, the innocence, the happiness that went out in the foul dens where glitters in hideous mockery "Ladies' Entrance"; and when the wives, the children, the mothers, and the myriad vicarious victims of the colossal selfishness and greed of the myrmidons of alcohol have been compensated for their agony of soul and body, for their withered lives and blasted hopes, then we will magnanimously strike out the tremendous charge of industrial waste, crime, ignorance, and poverty still remaining, and take up the matter of "compensating" the rum dealers for the incomparably slight monetary loss which they might incur should the nation awake to the awful truth that to endure it must become sober.

Through the haze Smith saw human figures floating

about him like weird shadows. As if from an immeasurable distance he heard Loring talking with his two companions.

"It's strictly business, Doctor," he heard one of them saying. "The barrel houses give their bums each an 'eye opener' every morning and start them out. These bums go from saloon to saloon, getting a 'brain duster' at each place, until they are again intoxicated and ready for business. And this business is begging, stealing, bunco-steering, or murder—it makes no difference. And all the gains come back to the barrel houses, making a very profitable business for the proprietors. Sometimes the saloonkeepers give the bums car fare and send them into the residence districts, where they 'panhandle' from house to house. Sometimes they go on crutches, or have their hands or heads bandaged, to draw the sympathy of the women. And they draw it, too, for they often come back to the barrel house with five or ten dollars, which of course they immediately spend for rotten whiskey."

A shriek interrupted him. Smith looked up in time to see a battered wretch fall to the sawdust floor in a whiskey fit. A moment later the proprietor gave an order, and the employes gathered up the poor sufferer and carried him out to the rear alley, where they left him to his fate in the bitter cold. Smith started for the alley, but one of his companions from the hotel stopped him.

"I am a detective, Mr. Smith," he explained. "I'll see that the fellow is taken to a lodging house."

"We will meet you there," said Loring. "Take him to Courtney's place."

Loring turned again to Smith. "The Danes have calculated," he said, "that every drink of brandy a man consumes shortens his life by twenty-five minutes. And it is said that the whole span of human life is shortened some six years as a result of whiskey drinking. And the irony of it is that saloonkeepers and those engaged in the liquor business suffer the maximum loss of life. That's part of their 'compensation,' you see. And, do you know? an appalling number of saloonkeepers die of cancer. Their business is a cancer on civilization, and so they manifest it on their bodies.

Divine justice, isn't it? But come now, we'll have a look-in at Courtney's."

From these scenes of filth and sordid vice; from these once-human faces, now drawn, debauched, infuriated; from this seething, fermenting vortex of human wretchedness and degradation, Loring led the nauseated Smith. Drawing their heavy overcoats about them, they faced the stinging wind and started north. In Canal Street they halted before a long, writhing line of humanity.

"It's the Bread Line," said the detective who remained with them. Loring nodded. Smith divined that the doctor had known of its existence and location, and had purposely conducted him there. But he did not stop to reason why.

The smear of drink lay thick upon the unshaven faces, the sunken cheeks, slouching shoulders, and drooping knees of that long line of miserable humanity crowding up to the small wagon, each to receive, after hours of weary waiting in the freezing temperature, a cup of coffee and a sandwich.

"They are yours, you know," again whispered Loring. But Smith replied not. They were the product of his traffic; and he now accepted them, forlorn, dejected, hopeless, faint from hunger, and trembling from debauchery. He had looked that night down the alcoholic vistas of the underworld, and now he knew that the lure of the Schmidt fortune was but the sallow light from the slow consumption of these lost souls. And he would have given it all at that moment to have saved but a single one of them.

At the end of the line a poor, shivering fellow suddenly sank with a heartrending moan. His companions hurriedly dragged him to the curb to await the police patrol, but before it arrived death had mercifully intervened.

"I recognize the man," said the detective, bending over the bundle of tatters. "A few years ago he was a banker, in La Salle Street. The saloon finally got him."

Smith shuddered and turned away. Loring followed and took his arm. "Do you still believe, my friend, that the prosperity of a community hinges upon a few saloons?" But Smith did not reply.

"Is it," the doctor went on, "is it really a question of

personal liberty, or of the probable value of alcoholic liquors as a beverage; is it a question of revenue; or is it something vastly deeper, vastly more vital—*the life of the nation?*"

Smith remained silent. He knew now that there was no "regulation" for the hell-devised traffic in strong drink.

A few minutes afterward they turned in at a dirty door and traversed a long, grimy hallway, dimly lighted by a flickering arc lamp. Mounting the worn stairs, they entered a dark, barn-like room, where, on the bare floor, lay hundreds of men. Some had old newspapers beneath them; some were sunk in a death-like sleep; some were shouting; others blasphemed. All were dressed, for none dared risk the loss of his scanty clothing by removing it. Never had Smith beheld such a motley assemblage of humanity. The air was fetid. Sickening odors steamed upward from the heaving mass. Vermin scampered with impunity over the damp floor, the ceiling, and the human bodies. This was "Courtney's Flop," and the monetary cost of a night's lodging in this awful environment was five cents.

"Why have you brought me here?" demanded Smith, turning upon Loring.

"They are yours," replied Loring, in a low, sad voice. "Alcohol brought them here."

The detective who had preceded them from the barrel house with the sick man, now joined them. "I got him a 'flop'," he announced, simply. "He'll be back in the barrel house to-morrow night."

When they were again in the street, dawn had pierced the eastern sky. Smith saw the breaking light with a great, sobbing sigh. The ghastly night had come to an end. Somewhere in those awful sinks of pollution which he had visited with Loring and the two grim officers he felt that he had left something that never was, never could be, his—a mesmeric something, an illusion, hideous and revolting, that, but for the undaunted intervention of the man whose arm now lay in his, must have utterly blasted his life.

"Let us stand here a moment," he heard Loring say. "Watch these workmen go into this saloon to get their morning drink before going to work. No, they are not

drinking to satisfy a depraved appetite; they *must* drink to tide their jaded bodies over another day. This is Saturday. These laborers have but one ambition: to exist through the week until Saturday night, when they can drown the memory of their monotonous lives with a quart of wood-alcohol whiskey, fusel oil, or the corrosive poisons sold them under the name of liquor. Oh, how they long for Saturday night! And when it comes it begins early—perhaps before supper. And it ends at midnight in drunken oblivion. Thousands and thousands of our workingmen have absolutely no ambition beyond the sodden debauch that will be theirs to-night! But the saddest feature of it all is that these poor wretches do not realize that if wage-earners would save the money they spend for liquor, and would pool their savings and their interests, they would be able in a very short time to purchase the leading industries of the country, and themselves become capitalists and manufacturers.

"But," he went on, "they are the victims of false education, and of the curse expressed in the sordid phrase: 'Nobody cares.' They believe, with the advocates of high license, that the saloon is a necessity, or a necessary evil. But—" his voice dropping "—I am not so far from agreeing with Molly Vaughn, that *no* evil is necessary—indeed, that evil is absolutely *un*necessary, and continues to exist in human consciousness only because of the persistent human belief that it is something real and unavoidable."

Smith threw the doctor a look of amazement, but it was largely because of the latter's unembarrassed reference to Molly Vaughn.

The doctor did not see him. "The drink bill of this city," he went slowly on, "is almost a million dollars a day. And what do the drinkers receive for this vast expenditure of money? I have shown you to-night. And, my friend, does it pay? Even judged by our accepted standard of value in America, gold, does it really pay? Why lament the high cost of living when a single city, like this, spends a million dollars a day for alcoholic liquors, and receives in return a reduced vitality, lessened ability, false stimulation, misery, wretchedness, disease, and death? Does it pay? In cold dollars and cents, does it?

"And does it pay even from the standpoint of the saloon-keeper? Ah, if the trafficker in liquor could but realize the reaction against himself which his foul business produces, he would flee from it as from a deadly pestilence! I have made a study of the past and present generations of a large number of liquor handlers, and I am aghast at the moral ruin that has come upon them! A blight overshadows them. The moral taint of their business damns them. The essence of the liquor traffic is the destruction of human character; and this is a sword that turns and smites the one who wields it. And the government, by licensing the traffic, is committed to the evil; and that evil is constantly reacting upon it, and will continue to do so most terribly. The trail of liquor is death, always death, to all who tread it in whatever capacity, be he brewer, distiller, dealer, or consumer. None escapes.

"And where now are your former arguments for the pauper-making, home-blasting, mind-destroying, gutter-filling business of producing and selling intoxicants? Government revenue? But do you know that for every dollar the government receives as license money it pays out sixteen dollars for the care of the saloon's demoralized, debauched, denatured human product?

"After all is said, there can be found but two arguments in defense of the liquor traffic: *the lust of gold and the lust of appetite.* There are no others!"

He stopped and held a whispered colloquy with the two detectives, and then dismissed them. "Our work is not finished," he said, addressing himself again to Smith. "I have an appointment at eight o'clock, and want you to accompany me. But let's go into this restaurant first and get a cup of coffee."

Smith had lived through the night; he knew he could face the day. Yet as he stood in the alcoholic ward of the great metropolitan hospital that morning and listened with aching ears to the shrieks of delirious men—heard them beg in pitiable agony to be put out of their torture—heard them call frenziedly to God or devil to ease their mental torments—heard their moans, their demoniac curses, their

heartrending prayers, the ghastly death-rattle in their burned-out throats, he paled and clutched Loring's arm. On the floor beside one of the beds he saw a young man kneeling in death. His agonized cries that death might relieve him had been mercifully answered, and the startled attendants were hurrying to lift the stiffening body to the bed. Upon other beds tossed men of all ages, some were mere boys. All were wild with delirium tremens, some so violent that they were strapped to their cots. At times the ward became a bedlam of ravings; again, a horror-filled stillness would suddenly descend upon it, only to be broken by a piercing shriek as some terrified victim yelled out in horror at the hideous creatures of his diseased imagination that were again upon him.

"Every eight minutes in this country a man or woman sinks into a drunkard's grave," said Loring, as he surveyed the awful scene. "And you think the liquor traffic a necessary evil, and capable of 'regulation'? God above! And no one escapes, I tell you!"

Then, more calmly: "I recall an investigation made by Richard A. Dugdale, of New York State, into the descendants of a drunkard named Max through seven generations. He found that of the five hundred and forty descendants of this man, two hundred and eighty were adult paupers, one hundred and forty were criminals of the worst type, having committed seven murders and innumerable crimes of theft, highway robbery, and other major offenses. And the estimated cost to the public for supporting this family whose ancestor had been permitted the fullest 'personal liberty' was more than a million dollars.

"And I, though I do not patronize the saloon, yet am made to suffer by it, for I am taxed to maintain the hospitals, the jails, the courts, and the asylums where its victims must be cared for. I am made to suffer from the increased cost of living, due to the spending of more than two billions of dollars annually in this country for liquor. I am made to suffer from the increase in crime, from the degeneracy, the lowered moral tone of the community where the saloon exists. In a thousand different ways I must pay for permitting the saloon to live—"

"Doctor," interrupted Smith, again seizing his arm, "I am—I must get out of this place—"

Loring paused. Then, nodding his head, he led the shaken man tenderly out. "I have just learned," he said gently, as if in soliloquy, "that she is in the woman's ward—convalescent."

They were in the corridor. Smith turned to him for explanation. "To whom do you refer?" he asked.

"Louise Vaughn, the mother of little Karl," came the low response.

Smith fell back with a gasp. "The mother—of—little—!"

"Yes," said Loring. "August Schmidt taught her to drink—and then—ruined her. Madeline—or Molly, as she is known in Filbert—took the disgrace upon herself to shield her younger sister, and—"

* * * * * *

Late that afternoon Smith rose from the bed where he had thrown himself, utterly exhausted, after returning to the hotel. The doctor sat writing at the *escritoire.* The harbingers of night were gliding through the crowded street without.

"I'm through, Doctor." A heavy sigh escaped Smith. It was almost a sob. "I'm through—forever."

Loring laid down his pen and turned around. A wave of pity surged over him as he looked into Smith's haggard face.

"I am through with the liquor business, Doctor." The mesmeric spell of gold lay broken; the Lure was extinguished.

Loring sprang to his feet and grasped Smith's hand. "Thank God!" he cried, while tears started from his eyes. "You have saved yourself, and us!"

Smith sat down on the edge of the bed. A wan smile lighted his clouded features. "You had planned this—it was your work?" he said, in a broken voice.

It was the doctor's turn to smile. "It was the last installment of my plan of systematic education for you," he replied. "You have had a month of bitter tutelage; but you are a wiser, saner man now," he continued. "And a better one.

"And now," he went on, briskly, "I will go back to Filbert to-night. You had best write to Denman and Shelby, and perhaps to Mulligan, saying that, for reasons of health, you are not returning to Filbert for some time. Go on to New York—or San Francisco, if you prefer—and write them again, saying that you are going abroad. Then you can disappear completely, as I had planned from the first. I will keep you in funds, and—"

Smith had taken out a cigarette and lighted it. For a moment he sat regarding it. Then, with a quick movement, he tossed it from him. "I think those had better go with liquor," he said, abruptly. Then he rose and came to Loring.

"Doctor, I go back to Filbert with you; and we go to-night."

Loring's face went white. "Why—what—do—you—mean?"

Smith smiled down into the doctor's perturbed features. "I see your plan, Doctor," he said, gently. "It has worked. You have educated me away from the most hellish traffic that man ever conceived. But you have also opened wide the door of opportunity. And my opportunity lies in Filbert."

"But, man! you cannot return to Filbert and your saloons and—"

"I am going back to work for the 'dry' cause," said Smith, scarcely above a whisper.

Loring gasped and struggled to his feet. "You—you will— But your life will be the penalty! And Taft's and mine!"

"I will give my own, gladly," was the low response. "But I will save you." He drew himself up, and a look of determination came into his set features. "I am the mayor of Filbert—and Filbert, though it cost my life, *is going 'dry'!*"

CHAPTER 27

MONDAY dawned upon Filbert fair and mild, presaging auspicious weather for the primaries to be held the next day. When City Clerk Mulligan projected his red thatch into the council chambers that morning and beheld the mayor, seated at his desk as usual, a prolonged sigh of relief broke from him, and his wrinkled, care-lined face lighted with a broad smile. And Denman, Moller, Lawver, and McCarty, who called successively at the city hall before noon, each laid off a burden of apprehension when fully convinced that it was really the mayor bending sedulously over his untidy desk. No questions were asked, and few comments voiced anent his brief absence from the city. It was Denman who advised this caution, attributing to the mayor motives which, he alleged, the latter must of necessity keep secret until the proper time for their disclosure.

But while joy dominated all other emotions in the breasts of the liquor leaders, it did not escape their notice and guarded comment that the mayor, since his return to Filbert, seemed more reticent than ever.

"An' hivin knows," exclaimed McCarty, "to make him talk was always harder'n drawin' milk fr'm a stone!"

What Denman thought was not disclosed; but to study the mayor more closely he called a meeting of the saloon forces at noon to survey their plans for the primary election. The conference yielded him no additional data, although he did learn that Dr. Loring had not returned to Filbert with the mayor. And the fact afforded him a measure of satisfaction.

Immediately following the noon conference "Clack" Harris called Miss Caroline Hazard by telephone. "Just to remind you," he announced, off-handedly, "to go to the primaries to-morrow, and get all your lady friends to go too. It's your one chance to defeat Jim Lawver, you know."

"But," queried Miss Hazard, in a voice tinged with

suspicion, "will that not tie us women up to the Democratic party for two years, under the primary law?"

"Naturally," came back the cheery answer. "But that makes no difference to you, for this is the women's most important election, as it gives them an opportunity to replace Lawver on the ticket with a good man."

"H'm. Well, I don't know that I agree with you. It seems to me that the selection of an honest mayor and council is much more important."

"But, my dear girl," he expostulated, "the women can't do a thing about that, you know. Such things are always managed by the regular political bosses."

"They always have been, that's true. But I think I may say that right there is where the women intend to take a hand now. And we don't propose to tie ourselves up to any political party, nor do we intend that the 'bosses' shall dictate what candidates we shall support."

"But—why, woman, you're crazy!" cried the impertinent and discomfited young supporter of rum rule. But there was no further reply from Miss Hazard, for she had indignantly hung up the receiver, nor would heed Harris' continued and insistent calls.

"Now ain't that always th' way!" commented McCarty, who had stood at Harris' elbow during the conversation. "A woman's that stubborn ye can't rayson wid her, f'r whin she's losin' she clams up an' won't spake! Women don't deserve th' vote! They ain't eddicated to vote, nohow!"

Meantime, Miss Hazard, having regained her composure, went to Roger Taft's office and reported the matter. The latter heard her in alarm.

"Why, good heavens!" he cried, "it would be death and destruction to all our hopes if you women tied yourselves up as Harris suggested. The women must constitute and remain the balance of power in a community, and never align themselves with any political party!"

Miss Hazard, her indignation again mounting as she sensed the ruse of the "wets," sat down at Taft's desk and rapidly drafted a crisp, terse letter to the women of Filbert, in which she urged them to remain away from the polls the

following day. This she signed as president of the Woman's Club and carried to the office of the *Tribunal*, with her own and Roger Taft's request that it be published that evening. Then she repaired to the *Budget* office with a copy of the letter and boldly laid it before General Diggin.

"May I ask you, General," she sweetly said, "what you think of Mr. Harris' suggestion?"

The general pounded his desk and emitted a roar. "Madam," he blared, "I am a Republican! I have always been a Republican! And even when at the head of the regiment which I had the honor to command—"

"Certainly, General," she hurriedly agreed. "And so you consider Mr. Harris' tactics—"

"A vile and despicable attempt of scoundrels to bind the fair women of Filbert to a political party that is utterly devoid of principle—a party that is as far removed from the pure tenets of Republicanism as—"

"The women should be warned, you think?" she gently interrupted.

"They should! And I shall compose an editorial for next Saturday's *Budget*—"

"But, my dear General, the primaries will be held tomorrow, you know."

"Quite true, quite true—er—"

"So why not publish this letter, just as it stands, tonight, to warn the women, then follow it with one of your incisive, illuminating editorials of explanation next Saturday?"

"I—I think I will do so, madam. Your suggestion, by the way, reminds me of the tactful manner in which General Grant, at the Battle of the Wilderness, handled the—"

* * * * * *

At five o'clock that afternoon "Clack" Harris was at the Hazard home, insolently demanding an interview with Miss Caroline. That young lady, although quite willing to grant it, permitted him to cool his heels in the chilly vestibule for a full half hour, and then, apologizing for the delay, cordially invited him to dine with her. And at the table she discoursed pleasantly on her Alma Mater, her trip down the

Rhine, the weather, and a thousand topics of apparently lively interest to her, but not once did she permit him to sustain a conversation on the points which again and again he strove to bring up. Harris left her presence hot and fuming and swearing fulsome vengeance. At "headquarters" he was greeted with jeers and imprecations.

"Ate fr'm her hand, did ye?" shouted McCarty, in deep scorn. "Oh, ye puir rat! Whist! pipe th' rosy spot on his cheek where she kissed him!"

"Hold your tongue!" angrily commanded Denman. "Now let's see—you say you dined with her—alone, eh? Something can be made of that. Yes, that's a good point, and we'll use it. But where's Shelby and Moller?"

"Down raising Diggin's scalp for publishing that Hazard letter," growled Harris.

"But we ain't got no chanst to come back at 'em now," groaned McCarty, with tears in his voice. "Clack's put th' kibosh on us good and plenty. What kin we do now, eh?"

"We'll have ten thousand handbills struck off at once and distributed around the city by noon to-morrow, denouncing the Hazard letter and explaining why the women should go to the polls," said Denman, quickly. "But, first, let me see what I can do with her." He took up the telephone. A moment later a response came from Miss Hazard.

"Er—ah—looks as if we'd have a good day for the primaries, Miss Hazard," he began, affably. "Of course you ladies are all going to turn out. No? Well, surely your letter in the evening papers did not voice your real convictions, did it? Indeed! Well, of course, as we are endeavoring to make this a clean campaign, entirely free from mud-slinging, I was painfully surprised to read your ungenerous reflection upon the Democratic party—especially as I had always so highly respected your father and considered him a loyal Democrat. Really, I regret that a daughter of his should take such an attitude as you have!"

For some ten minutes the conversation flowed along, becoming ever more amicable, while McCarty and Lawver revived their drooping spirits and threw each other significant winks, or held their sides and smothered their laughter as

they listened. At length Denman informed Miss Hazard that if the women wished anything that the administration had power to grant, he would be more than pleased to have them call at his office, where he would advise with them and render every assistance possible, in view of the fact that they were quite inexperienced in the devious business of politics.

"Or, if you prefer," he added, in an unguarded moment, "call on the mayor. We believe, from your letter, that there are certain matters which you do not fully understand, and we would be pleased to explain them to you."

And thus it came about that the keen Miss Hazard, with full permission to apply to the mayor for assistance, took immediate advantage of it and called the mayor by telephone that very evening.

"You say it was Mr. Denman's suggestion that you come to me?" said Smith, greatly wondering. "Well, I certainly cannot refuse *him* anything. And what may I do for you?"

"We want a registration day before the election," she quickly answered. "In order to give the women a little experience and assurance at the polls before they cast their first ballot. Will you support us if we appeal to the council for it?"

"I most certainly will," he assured her, in a hearty tone. "The council meets to-night."

That evening Filbert hummed with unwonted activity. At eight o'clock the council assembled, but with an atmosphere of gloom pervading the hall. Mulligan's report had just been read—including the street commissioner's bill for thirty-one days' labor in February—when Miss Hazard arrived with a delegation from the Woman's Club.

With the humiliating memory of a similar visit before them, the aldermen groaned aloud and fell back in helpless resignation. But Smith, true to his word, arose and announced to the council that it was both his own and Mr. Denman's desire to make everything easy for the women in this, their first election, and that they were both strongly in favor of granting the petition which he knew the ladies were about to present.

Denman, who was present, started from his chair—but

sat quickly down again as his conversation with Miss Hazard that afternoon recurred to him. Attorney Shelby, however, sprang valiantly forward. From the depths of his mental storehouse he hastily brought forth a certain legal phrase, in the light of which, he averred, it might be impossible for the council to grant the request of the women. And upon this particular phrase he beat such a persistent tattoo that the aldermen themselves, as they listened, became utterly confused, with the result that when Shelby concluded his long, ambiguous speech they unanimously voted to grant the women's request.

Shelby and Denman collapsed. Smith smiled and congratulated the women. Whereupon Miss Hazard graciously thanked the aldermen in a reply to Shelby's speech which showed that she understood perfectly his attempted ruse, while enjoying to the utmost its effect upon the dull wits who guided the unfortunate city's destinies.

She had scarcely concluded when Combs, Filbert's most prominent real estate dealer, submitted a petition, praying for an ordinance to restrain church edifices from being erected within a certain prescribed distance from residence property; and this he did to prevent the building of the Third Ward Baptist Church near one of his own lots which he feared would suffer in value thereby, and wholly indifferent to the fact that the presence of churches kept saloons away. And the council, hopelessly addled by what had gone before, at once granted the petition, and then immediately adjourned, amid roars of laughter from the amused spectators.

When Smith passed out into the corridor he found the aldermen drawn up in little groups, feverishly discussing their action, and frightened beyond measure at the probable consequences. Shelby was so violently angry that he threatened Smith with bodily harm. Denman had departed in utter disgust. And far into the early hours of morning the storm roared, with the angry "drys" denouncing the bewildered aldermen for granting the Combs petition, and the "wets" as loudly threatening them for their imbecile conduct in granting a registration day to the jubilant women.

And the storm continued unabated for five days, until Denman and Shelby, unable longer to endure the situation, forced the aldermen, over the head of the obstinate mayor, to call a special session of the council to revoke the two pernicious enactments.

But in the meantime the primaries were held. And of the five thousand enfranchised women of Filbert, only a scant one hundred went to the polls.

CHAPTER 28

CHARLES SMITH had returned to Filbert alone. Hours of pleading and protest had availed Loring nothing: in the midst of the doctor's most potent argument against such madness, Smith had silently packed his valise and left the hotel. That night he entered Filbert unheralded, and mounted the dirty steps to his cheerless abode, a solitary, pathetic figure, holding his life in his hands.

He knew he was isolated; knew that, despite his change of front, there could be no open collaboration with Taft and Loring, for their safety lay in maintaining the delicate balance of relationship which had existed before. The problem was his alone; the extinguishing of the Lure was his secret and Loring's, nor could either hint its existence without incurring the gravest dangers. And yet he had come back to Filbert to grapple with men whom he knew to be utterly soul-hardened, conscienceless, and sunk in moral ruin—men whose anarchistic insistence on their unmoral "rights" would not balk at the annihilation of every obstacle that opposed them.

To enter his saloons again cost him a long struggle; but it had to be done, and he fought with himself that night until he could face the fact steadily. In his lower Main Street saloon he discovered the bartender inditing an anonymous letter to Miss Hazard, conveying a vitriolic threat against her political activities. Smith took the malicious missive from the man and thrust it into his pocket.

"Those things get us nowhere," he said, gulping down

his indignation. "I have not hired you to conduct this campaign."

"But Mr. McCarty said I should do it!" protested the offended employe.

"You will take orders only from me," replied Smith, in a cold tone. Yet in his heart he pitied the ignorant man.

And then, to the utter consternation of the bartender, he quietly announced that thenceforth no women should be permitted in his saloons.

"We are going to clean up a bit," he explained. "It's politics, you know. Take down those pictures," pointing to the paintings of nude women adorning the grimy walls. "And these 'Beer And Egg Spring Tonic' signs—tear 'em up! As for that free lunch slop, throw it all out. We'll have no free lunch hereafter."

The bartender gasped. Smith smiled at him grimly. Then he went behind the bar.

"The whiskey that we sell hereafter," he resumed, "will be real whiskey, and not the poisonous blends and rectified stuff that constitute eighty-five per cent of the so-called whiskey sold over the bars of this country. All this 'Famous Brand' dope here—pour it into the gutter! A hundred million gallons of this rectified brain-destroyer is drunk every year in America, and yet it is distilled, compounded, and aged over night, and then sold as 'Ten Year Old.' One drink of the accursed stuff is enough to blow your hat off!"

He started away, but his license, framed and hanging over the bar, caught his eye. He stopped and stood before it, wondering how he could have tried so desperately and conscientiously to make himself like the liquor business.

"My license," he mused. "My government's permission to send my fellow men to hell!—to fill insane asylums, destroy brains, make slums, create murderers, street-walkers, dive-keepers—my government's license to wreck homes, slaughter women and babes, and to furnish food for the gallows! How can a prosperous community exist without the licensed saloon? How, indeed!"

Then he turned and walked slowly out, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back.

With the election but four weeks off, Royal Denman had again taken stock, and was now gloomily reflecting upon the stupidity of his lieutenants, which had cost him heavily to date. To just what extent the mayor was responsible for the ludicrous fiasco of the recent council meeting, he could not determine, try as he might. Nor could he say that the mayor's action in improving the condition of his saloons was not commendable as a campaign move. But the entanglement of General Diggin—that was the sharpest trick yet turned by the "drys," who, by Miss Hazard's discovery of the weak spot in the old warrior's armor, had scored a deadly thrust. Why had he not thought of it himself, and thus outwitted her? It was inexcusable! And now he was debarred from exerting any influence upon the general by the latter's threat to shoot him on sight.

Well, why not let himself be shot? It would put a quietus on the raging general and enlist unbounded sympathy for the "wet" cause, perhaps even insure its victory. But he paled and shuddered at the awful thought!

In the midst of his gloomy soliloquy the door burst open and Shelby flung himself into the room.

"The mayor!" he gasped. "He has just issued an order closing the saloons on Sunday!"

Denman changed countenance, and sat staring dully at Shelby, with his brain working furiously. Out of his little eyes a fierce light gleamed for an instant. Then his face took on a dry smile.

"Well," he drawled, with a labored effort, "he is merely enforcing the ordinance, isn't he? I advised it as a good campaign move, calculated to take considerable wind out of the enemy's sails."

"You advised it! But it isn't going to elect Schmidt to the legislature!" Shelby argued.

Denman reflected for a moment. Then, his drawl rising in a little squeak: "It is possible that Gus is not the man for the legislature—eh?"

Shelby threw him a quizzical glance. Then he drew up a chair and sat down. "You think Gus lacks—balance?" he ventured, at length.

"He lacks *character,*" Denman amended, giving the word a peculiar emphasis.

Shelby hunched his chair nearer. "Had you heard that he'd ordered his saloons closed every night at ten?" he asked.

Denman's only reply was his pallid smile. And further conversation on the subject was prevented by the noisy entrance of Alderman McCarty.

"Burns tells me Loring's back," the burly alderman announced, lighting a huge cigar and seating himself, with his hands folded complaisantly across his stomach. "Brought a colleen wid him," he added, with a jerk.

"What's that?" demanded Denman, sitting up. "Who is she?"

"Dunno," McCarty returned. "He's got her up at St. Catherine's. She's sick."

Denman sat for a moment, cudgeling his flagging brain. Then he reached for the telephone and called up Father Achtung. A few moments later he had the desired information.

"Well," asked Shelby, studying the peculiar expression on Denman's face, "who is she?"

The latter leaned over the table and spoke with feverish earnestness. "Boys, we've got to smash 'em! We've *got* to! They're winning every move! They've got Louise Vaughn up at St. Catherine's! What ails you fellows that you're so accursedly helpless?"

"We ain't helpless," protested McCarty, with a sense of injury. "It's you an' th' mayor that's always givin' us bum steers!"

The hot retort that sprang to the lawyer's lips was checked by the arrival of Lawver and Moller. "Say," the former called out loudly, "who says now I ain't popular with the ladies, eh?"

Denman turned to him with a sneer. "You got the nomination, James," he said, "but you'll have to withdraw. Your tongue wagged too glibly after your factory burned. A pretty set of imbeciles you fellows are—all of you!"

Lawver flushed. "I'll not withdraw!" he cried, with an oath. McCarty sprang to his feet and, leaning over the table, shook a huge fist at Denman.

"I've got this much to say to you, me frind," the alderman sputtered: "Giner'l Diggin's waitin' to shoot ye on sight, an' if ye want a measly coward ye'd go to his office an' ram th' gun down his own throat! 'Tis th' only way I know f'r ye to help th' 'wet' cause!"

"Now, now, boys!" interposed Moller, seizing McCarty's arm and pulling him back from the table. "We can't afford to have a split in our ranks! Things are going bad enough as it is!"

"'Tis right ye air!" angrily agreed McCarty. "Things is dommed bad whin th' mayor first has a fight wid Doc Loring and th' doc calls him 'Smith,' an' thin His Honor goes off to Chicago wid him an' comes back an' closes th' saloons on Sundays! 'Tis dommed bad, I say! But we what notices them things is called 'imbeciles' by th' larned lawyer here," bowing sarcastically to Denman.

"There, Bill—!" broke in Moller again. But McCarty waved him aside.

"Is it because ye air overtrained in th' fine distinc-shuns that yez don't notice whin a mountain falls on ye, eh?" he cried, while he emphasized his vehement remarks with dramatic gestures. "There's a dry wave rollin' over this country that's agoin' to projuce th' dommedest drouth on record! An' what air yez wise guys doin' to stop it, eh? Whin a whole state, like Colorado, wid its whoopin', rip-roarin', hell-defyin' minin' camps suddenly drys up—whin Utah lays down th' Matrimonial News an' reaches f'r the ladder to mount th' water wagon—whin th' great brewers av Milwaukee an' Chicago take a squint at th' sky an' thin quietly sell their stock to ginks what can't see th' handwritin' no more than you—whin th' scrappin' European powers knock out liquor first so's they won't see double an' overestimate th' inimy—I say 'tis time f'r yous molders av public sintimint to shade y'r eyes wid y'r hand an' obsarve th' cloudless hivins, an' thin advise y'r tight-wad frinds av Filbert to prepare to pay their taxes, f'r th' drouth's settin' in!"

A strange light had been slowly dawning in Denman's eyes. When McCarty concluded his heated remarks the lawyer turned to him. "What was that you said, Bill, about a fight between Loring and the mayor?" he queried.

The apparent irrelevance of the question nettled the alderman. He shrugged his shoulders. "Go ax Mulligan, if ye'd know," he muttered, quite unappreciative of the significance of his information.

Denman rose and held out his hand to McCarty. "I—I think I was—hasty, Bill," he said, gently. "We've all made mistakes, and I admit that a lot of them have been mine. But I'm sure things will go better from now on. And—" He turned, as the door opened. "Hello, Burns. Well, what now?" noting the peculiar expression on the former policeman's face.

Burns approached and drew Denman aside. "Mr. Howlett," he said, in an undertone, "is a friend of yours?"

"Why, yes. What of it?"

"I've seen you an' him together a lot. An' he's hobnobbed wid all th' liquor people of Filbert since he come to town—"

"Yes. He's just a young fellow visiting here, with a view to going into business in Filbert."

"Mr. Denman—" Burns drew nearer and spoke in a whisper. "—that young fellow is one of the best newspaper men in New York, and he's come here to be campaign secretary for the 'drys'! They've put one over on you again, Mr. Denman, I'm sorry to say!"

The lawyer stifled a cry and dropped into a chair, where he remained, head bowed and inert.

* * * * * *

But, despite repeated setbacks, the next move by the liquor forces resulted in another disastrous blow to their cause. The *Item,* the local Democratic newspaper, notoriously "wet," took up the Hazard letter as a personal challenge, and, heedless of Denman's warning, published a violent diatribe against the women who permitted themselves to be kept away from the primaries by Miss Hazard, and ended by dubbing that very able young person the "Pope of the Woman's Club."

Immediately from every quarter arose a hue and cry. The religious issue was being injected into the campaign! In the excitement of the moment Miss Hazard again played

upon the inordinate vanity of General Diggin and cleverly induced him to publish the full text of the "Anti-Saloon League Statement" in the *Budget*, to prove, as she naïvely put it, that the appeal of the "drys" was to every religious faith, without discrimination.

The storm waxed louder and more violent. The editor of the *Item* so berated General Diggin in his paper that the frothing general stormed the *Item* office and pummeled its diminutive editor into a mass of bruised flesh, to the accompaniment of a dramatic recital anent the manner in which General Burnside was superseded by Hooker after the fiasco at Fredericksburg. The militant editor of the *Budget* got himself haled into a whiskey-dominated court for this act, but Smith forced his immediate release and the remittance of his heavy fine.

The stirring events of the week drew rapidly to a climax, and culminated in the mayor's peremptory dismissal of Chief of Police Bale for refusal to enforce the Sunday-closing ordinance. The chief promptly carried the matter to the board of police commissioners. Then Smith, with equal promptitude, dismissed the commissioners themselves, leaving them agape with astonishment. Denman hurried perspiring into the breach. But Smith quietly pointed out to him that the police commissioners were required by law to furnish bonds before they were competent to become members of the board, and not one of them had ever complied with this requirement.

"But—man!" cried Denman, wild with fear, "are you crazy? To dig up these matters right in the midst of the campaign is ruinous to our cause! Drop it, I tell you! Drop it!"

"I would remind you, my friend, that I am the mayor," replied Smith, calmly. "I take orders from no one."

"But you will take orders from me—!"

Smith laughed in his face.

"Or you'll be placed where you'll take them from men in uniform!"

Smith dropped a heavy hand upon the lawyer's collar. "Explain," he said, with ominous calmness.

Denman paled. He was going too far. His craven heart was pounding like a triphammer. "Gus," he whined, "would you ruin yourself? Everything you've got is in liquor!"

"I have nothing—now," said Smith, in a gentler tone.

"But the State Liquor Association will advance you the money to pay off your mortgages—any amount! They consider this campaign in Filbert the most important one in the state this year. If they lose here, they—"

"Very well," Smith broke in, with a queer little smile. "Draw on them for two hundred thousand for me. I really can't be expected to show much enthusiasm until these mortgages are paid, can I?"

Denman hurried back to his office to reflect. In the week immediately following Smith's return to Filbert, event had followed event in quick succession. And the rapidity with which they occurred, combined with their wholly unanticipated character, had kept Denman's plans in a perpetual state of frustration, and his thought confused. The contemptible trick which the leaders of the "drys" had turned in forcing their campaign secretary, Howlett, upon the "wets" in the guise of a friendly and disinterested visitor in Filbert, had aroused bitter feeling throughout the city, and covered Denman with humiliation, beneath which the fires of anger raged the more fiercely.

As for the mayor, the self-imposed regulation of his own saloons had given the lawyer a mild shock. The sudden enforcement of the Sunday-closing ordinance jarred him perceptibly. And yet he was not convinced that the mayor had acted unwisely, even though it had been done without advice from him. But now, he learned, the mayor had just peremptorily ordered the police department to clean up the "red light" district—nay, more, to close it and keep it closed, despite the fact that the liquor forces were counting heavily on the women of the underworld to neutralize the female "dry" vote! Was this the mayor's revenge on Greta Schwartz? Would he deliberately "throw" the election because of his pique? And yet Denman could not deny that the mayor was acting as would any man of red blood who

had been so shabbily treated. Yes, the lawyer reflected, he himself had acted unwisely in not taking Schmidt more completely into his confidence. The mayor's "accident" and its consequent unsolved mystery—Loring's peculiar part in the drama—and Denman's own unfounded suspicions and his collection of disjointed data—nothing of this entered into the situation at that moment. Schmidt—or whoever he might be or whatever the change he might have suffered—must be taken at his face value and quickly mollified.

It was largely, perhaps solely, a question of the mayor's heavy indebtedness, Denman concluded, after another review of the chief executive's eccentric conduct. And so he rose from his meditations and hurried out to find Herr Schwartz and endeavor to secure for the mayor a modification of terms and a more satisfactory working basis.

But, unfortunately, the thrifty Schwartz was now too greatly alarmed to give the matter a moment's consideration. And Denman was thrown back upon himself once more.

And then his roving, searching thought hit upon the campaign fund, the heavy contributions by the state liquor organizations to defeat Filbert's "drys." To draw upon this to liquidate the mortgages on the mayor's properties—ah! And then to charge it off to "campaign expense" if the "wets" were victorious!

And victorious now they should be!

Meanwhile, Miss Hazard laughed over her triumphs and planned fresh *coups;* Taft trembled between hope and black despair; and Loring labored and grimly awaited the issue. Taft's prediction, made that fateful Sunday night at the launching of the local option campaign, was being literally fulfilled. Filbert was indeed rent from end to end! Business was disrupted. Men stood about in groups and argued excitedly. Anonymous letters sped to all parts of the city. Leaders of the "dry" forces would awake mornings to find their yards and steps strewn with empty whiskey bottles. Malicious rumors sprang up like poisonous mushrooms. Characters were violently assailed, and bitter recriminations flew in all directions.

To Smith, alone and friendless, swinging his axe in the

thick dust of battle, there came at rare moments surges of exquisite joy. He was stripped bare of the world's gifts, his life hung by a thread, and his raw conscience bled incessantly—and yet, as he held Fate itself at bay, he realized something of the emotion voiced by the great American:

"Aggressive fighting for the right is the greatest sport the world knows."

CHAPTER 29

AS Denman pondered and planned, he gradually dwelt less on the expediency of pacifying the mayor, important as that was, and more on the possibilities accruing from the sudden addition to the Schwartz fortune of the generous amount of cash necessary to liquidate the mortgages on the Schmidt properties. If his carefully devised plans succeeded, the defeat of the saloon forces in April would leave Miss Greta's heritage still large, while his own bill for services rendered the liquor interests during the campaign should equal the amount he would draw from campaign contributions to take up the mayor's mortgages. And so, a few days later, he sent for Smith and informed him that the mayor's indebtedness had been taken care of.

Smith received the information coldly. For a few moments he sat immersed in thought. Then he looked up. "Quite a tidy sum for old Schwartz," he commented. "But I guess he'll need it." And then he laughed.

Denman's expression altered. "What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

Smith rose. "I don't know much about it," he said. "But I think the Vaughn case is to be opened again."

"Who—told—you—that?" Denman gasped, clutching the arms of his chair.

"Why," returned Smith, easily, "I received a summons a few minutes ago. Didn't you get yours? Suit has just been filed against Schwartz *et al.* You and I constitute the *et al,* I guess."

"But—Molly Vaughn hasn't any money—"

"Gale and Loring are furnishing it."

Denman leaped to his feet and came up to Smith. His face was ashen. "Look here," he cried, "you can't play fast and loose with me! What are you and Loring up to now? Is this the way you show gratitude for what I have just done for you?"

"For me?" queried Smith, with mildly affected surprise. "For yourself and your prospective bride, you mean. I understand you are contemplating matrimony."

"That's a lie!" blurted Denman.

Smith seized the angry man by the shoulders and shook him like a rat, then whirled him about and shoved him into a chair. "You cur!" he muttered.

Then he laughed again, a low, contemptuous, sneering laugh. "I thought that was it," he said, nodding his head. "It was a good guess. Humph!"

With which he turned and went out, slamming the door noisily, and leaving the cringing, shivering lawyer to his own base fears and unhappy reflections.

In his choking sense of defeat, and now realizing to the full what a "dry" victory would mean to him, Denman struggled to the surface of the sea of trouble into which he had been cast and grasped frenziedly at every passing straw. The "religious issue" promised the most immediate results, and he seized upon it with desperation. He knew that the vestry of the local Episcopal church had summoned Allen to explain his signature on the roll of the Public Welfare League, and he rightly conjectured that but a slight stirring of the smoldering fuel would produce a conflagration. With a canny wisdom worthy of a better cause, he composed an essay and inserted it in the editorial columns of the *Item* under the caption "The Church and Drink." This essay, whose authorship was known only to Denman and the editor of the *Item*, cited in minutest detail the commendatory Scriptural references to alcoholic liquors. In startling language it showed how Jehovah had commanded the use of strong drink in the worship offered to Him—showed that the prophets had approved and commended its use—that Jesus himself had begun his public ministry with the making of wine—that the Apostles used and prescribed it—that Martin Luther had conducted a brewery—

And then, as a climax, it cited the Fathers of Methodism as pronouncing wine "one of the noblest cordials in nature," and John Wesley himself resuming the use of strong drink to prove that "Christianity does not require abstinence," while Whitfield, the greatest of Methodist preachers, had been loud in his denunciation of prohibition—all proving incontrovertibly that neither the Fathers nor Jesus could be received into membership in the Protestant churches of to-day!

A roar of protest broke forth as a consequence, and on the morning following the appearance of the obnoxious article the Methodists of Filbert assembled in their church edifice in stormy indignation. The "wets" remained calm and uncommunicative, but that evening the *Item* carried another well-written editorial, this time quoting the Episcopal Church as affirming that wine is a "holy gift," which it invoked God to "bless and sanctify." It was significant that Allen had been summoned to appear again before the vestry that same evening, and that in his defense he quoted freely from this most opportune editorial.

The Episcopalians stood with mouths agape at the affront. The Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Glenn Clifford, called upon the Episcopal rector and urged him to retaliate. But certain influential members of the latter's congregation interposed, alleging a loss of dignity and prestige to a religious denomination so aristocratic as theirs. Let the Methodists reply—they were "dry as dust," anyway, while the more liberal Episcopalians found no heinous sin in taking a little wine now and then "for the stomach's sake," if for no more convivial reason. Some of the good people declared prohibition to be antagonistic to the divine order, because it would destroy freedom of choice. Others pronounced it unchristian to prohibit a thing that Jesus himself practiced. Those who supported Allen loudly demanded that the matter be dropped; religious persecution, they declared, ill-became this 20th century!

The Reverend Mr. Clifford thereupon summoned a meeting of the Filbert Ministerial Association, and laid before that august body the vital necessity of immediately donning their

armor and plunging into the fray. The issue had ceased to be merely controversial; the Lord was calling upon His faithful to drive the demon rum from his foul haunts! The ministers must enter the fight at once! Too long had they dreamed in their false sense of security!

In vain did Loring and Taft plead and protest. The business men, they urged, did not want the ministers in the campaign. The suppression of the saloons was so largely an economic problem—

"Keep religion out of politics, I beg of you! Let the business men handle this problem!" cried Loring, as he saw the direction the tide was taking. "We have the battle won, if you will but—!"

"Can you ask us to credit you with sincerity, Doctor," asked the Reverend Mr. Clifford, gravely, "when we know how intimate you have been recently with the mayor, how you have frequented his rooms, taken trips to Chicago with him, and compromised yourself and our cause in a hundred ways?"

Loring's tongue was silenced and his hands tied. And forthwith the ministers rushed madly into the fray, but drew with them a divided flock. Allen withdrew from his church and threw his support to the liquor forces. The Ministerial Association retaliated with a sharp slap at the sodden spirit of commercialism manifested by many of Filbert's business men. And the result was a further recruiting of "wet" supporters from among the merchants and bankers of the torn city.

It was at this juncture that the Reverend Mr. Tislin thought he saw his long-awaited opportunity to even matters with the mayor for the mental drubbing administered by the latter on the night the clergyman was arrested by Officer Burns. And so the misguided Tislin penned what purported to be a facetious sketch of the mayor's activities in the administration of his office, and dwelt at length upon the love of beer as the spring from which the Teuton draws his highest inspirations. Had Ross, of the *Tribunal*, seen this foolish and undignified school-boy composition when it was brought to his office, it never would have crept into the

columns of his newspaper. But the Reverend Mr. Tislin had taken it directly to the city-editor. And the latter, often suspected by Ross of "wet" proclivities, accepted it at once and highly commended the flattered clergyman for his brilliant effort. And then, before smuggling it into the *Tribunal,* the city-editor took the article to Royal Denman as a prize of war.

The effect was that of a mine sprung beneath the entrenched "drys." The Teutonic element of Filbert's population read the trivial article in which the minister cast cheap ridicule upon the Germans of the city, and then swung quietly, and almost as a unit, into the ranks of the "wets." Had the election been held the following day, the "drys" would have met a crushing defeat.

All the next day the anti-saloon forces moved about as if attending the funeral of their withered hopes. Gloom lay thick and heavy over the office of the Civic League, where Loring, Taft, and Miss Hazard strove feverishly to stem the tide of disaster and nullify the effects of the minister's inexplicable conduct. And the latter sat among them, weeping and heartbroken, begging them over and over again to assure him that he had not caused the defeat of their great movement to suppress the saloon—an assurance which they could not give the crushed and penitent man.

That night, through the *Item,* Denman replied to Mr. Tislin in a terse, dignified article, to which he signed the name of Albert Hoch, President of the Public Welfare League. It was a clever reply that won countless votes for the liquor forces and drove the black shadows deeper into the quivering souls of the "drys."

"We are lost!" moaned Taft, burying his head in his hands after reading Denman's reply. "The ministers are fighting among themselves; the business men are turning from us because of the ministers; and the blow that Tislin has given us is the finish!"

"For God's sake, Mr. Taft, don't say that!" moaned the wretched minister, again bursting into tears. "Heaven knows I—"

"There, my friend," soothed Loring, taking the limp

clergyman by the arm and leading him to the door. "Go home now and try to forget it."

"But, Doctor, you think—you think you can overcome the effects of my thoughtless work—you do, don't you, Doctor?" the suffering man pleaded, clinging to Loring and looking up beseechingly into his face.

The doctor's heart was wrung. "Yes, yes, of course. It will all come out right, I am sure. Go now."

Loring returned and sat down beside Miss Hazard. "Well?" he said, looking into her deep, black eyes.

She returned his look with a brisk smile. Then her eyes snapped. "Doctor," she said, "the biggest attempt at deceiving the people which the 'wets' have ever devised is their statement that prohibition means financial loss. Now let me give you a suggestion about buying real estate. Mr. Denman got the 'wets' of Plainfield and the former saloon-keepers and brewers of that city to put 'For Sale' signs on their own residences and stores and on the vacant buildings all over the town. Now I want you and other men of wealth among the 'drys' here to slip down to Plainfield and offer to buy those places. If they sell, you will have no difficulty selling them over, perhaps at increased values. It has been done elsewhere in towns that have gone 'dry.' If they refuse to sell, then we will make excellent campaign material out of the refusal. We are not defeated yet, by a good deal! Not yet, Doctor! Not yet!"

* * * * * *

Day after day, toiling at his desk, keenly watchful, and working subtly to undermine the defenses over which he ostensibly stood guard, Smith saw the tide ebb and flow. His personal encounters with Denman were now less frequent, but he knew that the lawyer's close surveillance never for a moment relaxed. The very air seemed pregnant with danger. Spies surrounded him. His every move was instantly reported. And, under the immense strain, his growing desire to assert his own individuality, to come out boldly and defy the blow which he knew was creeping, foully, stealthily, upon him, struggled desperately with the now acute necessity of enacting in perfection his dangerous

rôle as mayor. It was a melancholy struggle, for he fought alone. His mad egomania had stranded him upon the shoals of an enfeebled self.

Night after night, often in the early hours of morning, he paced back and forth before the house of Molly Vaughn, a prey to corroding remorse. Sometimes he hung at the gate, determined to enter and throw himself at her feet and plead for pardon and for the aid which he now knew was a pearl that he had trampled in the mire. But shame and self-condemnation held him. Fear, too, lest he drag her with him into the black abyss toward which he felt himself drifting. Again and again he had checked himself in the act of giving the order to return little Karl to her. He dared not now, for her own sake. Often he wrote checks to send to her—but destroyed them, lest even this act become known and endanger them both. But he did one day apply for life insurance, naming little Karl as beneficiary—only to learn, with a great shock, that his business debarred him from insurance benefits. He turned away, silent and with bowed head, and went back to his desk, with before him the glorified vision of the defenseless, dauntless woman, whose bitter sufferings in the fires of alcohol had been but the harbingers of a spiritual unfoldment which had lifted her forever above their power to harm.

In the tense days of the past week he had seen the liquor arguments cogently and completely met and refuted by Miss Hazard and the corps of lecturers and publicity agents whom she assembled around her. He had seen the overthrow of such "wet" refuges as: "Prohibition does not prohibit," "The farmers and traveling men do not like a 'dry' town," and the sophistry of "personal liberty," and "increased taxation." He had smiled in amusement when, after the "wets" had triumphantly produced a hale octogenarian who had drunk whiskey all his life, Miss Hazard just as triumphantly cited the name and exact address of an equally healthy nonagenarian who never had touched the debilitating drug. And yet he felt such give and take to be futile of permanent results. The fickle human mind was highly emotional, he knew, as demonstrated by the effect upon the Germans of

Filbert produced by the Reverend Mr. Tislin's silly effusion. But it was equally patent that the liquor traffic was not to be successfully fought with emotional appeals. Something else was needed. Education in cold, scientific facts? Yes, but more, something vastly finer, infinitely deeper. Molly Vaughn knew what it was, and would have told him—

In the heat of the battle over the "religious issue" he had gone boldly to Father Achtung and demanded an expression of the priest's views on the liquor question. "Most of us saloonkeepers, Father, are members of your congregation," he again said. "So come, tell me where you stand. There is no neutral ground."

And Father Achtung replied: "I am against any laws that interfere with the personal liberty of the individual. This is the stand taken by our Church, which holds that all attempts to curtail such liberty should be discouraged. I believe prohibition to be such an attempt. I believe it to be an unwise movement—"

"But the local issue," persisted Smith. "Are you for or against it?"

"I advocate self-denial, temperance, but not reform by coercion," was the guarded reply. "But I would urge our people to quit the dangerous traffic in alcoholic liquors as soon as possible, and devote themselves to some other method of making a living."

"And how soon do you think your advice will be heeded?" asked Smith. "You have preached here for twenty years, and all that time we saloonkeepers have sat Sunday after Sunday and listened to you, and then gone from here to our saloons and thrown them wide open to the thirsty public. Either the preachers of Filbert are pathetic visionaries, or else they are little concerned with affairs this side of the grave."

"My son," the priest gravely answered, "your words surprise me, coming from the leader of the saloon forces. But let me say now that whoever says that our Church is in league with the liquor traffic is uttering slander. We have waited, patiently, before joining hands with non-Catholics to strike at the saloon. We have been in doubt as to the

wisdom of such a course. The Church has never opposed any popular movement by the people when convinced that such movement was not injurious to her own best interests or to the interests of the faith and morals of her people. I think, if you make the search, you will discover that there is a growing opposition among Catholics against the liquor traffic. If we in Filbert have been slow, it is because we have been seeking wisdom. I believe with Cardinal Manning, that it is mere mockery to ask us to put down drunkenness by moral and religious means when the legislature facilitates the multiplication of the incitements to intemperance on every hand. And you, August, are a candidate for the legislature of this state. What, may I ask, will you do when elected?"

Smith bent over the priest, with his eyes blazing. "I confess to you, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, that if ever I get a chance to hit the damnable business I shall hit it good and hard! And you may announce that from your pulpit, if you wish!"

That afternoon Smith discovered in a current number of a brewers' trade journal, which came to him regularly in the name of August Schmidt, slanders against the German people, penned by hirelings of American brewers. He marked the articles and mailed the magazine to Miss Hazard. And then, lest she fail to see what he had indicated, he called Loring by telephone and told him what he had done. The telephone operator immediately reported the conversation to Royal Denman. The mayor, she said, had told Dr. Loring that this brewers' journal acknowledged that "alcohol is a poison, that it shortens life, lessens the power to resist disease, and lowers the working capacity of both mind and body."

"Some hope from that quarter," the doctor had bluntly commented. "But come to the lecture to-night at Templar's Hall. You'll hear something further along that line." And Smith accepted the invitation.

The lecture had been widely advertised in the newspapers of Filbert for a week, and yet the public had been unable to learn whether it was to be a "wet" or a "dry" talk, so

cleverly and so ambiguously had the advertisements been worded. Hundreds of "wets" decided that it was to be held under liquor auspices, as the hall where it was to be delivered was not one of those so cleverly contracted for by the "drys" at the opening of the campaign. But the anti-saloon forces were equally positive that the lecture would be "dry." No one seemed to be quite certain. And therein Smith saw another opportunity. He met Miss Hazard that evening as she was coming down from the Civic League headquarters.

"Are you people giving the lecture to-night?" he abruptly asked.

She stopped and looked at him oddly for a moment. "I will tell you," she replied, "on one condition."

"Name it," he said, with a smile.

"That you attend the lecture and sit on the platform."

"I'll do it," he instantly agreed. His own inquiry had been answered.

And by that lecture did Miss Caroline Hazard's genius accomplish much toward reconciling the divided churchmen and quelling the unfortunate religious controversy. According to the program which she had arranged, the invocation was made by the Reverend Mr. Clifford, the Presbyterian minister; a duet was sung by the pastors of the Methodist and Baptist churches; a Catholic priest from an adjoining city delivered the principal address of the evening; and the benediction, closing the meeting, was pronounced by the Episcopal rector. On the platform, at Miss Hazard's right, sat the mayor, the cynosure of all eyes. And the wondering audience was divided almost evenly into "wets" and "drys." The good-nature that prevailed throughout the evening, even among the "wets," who had been hoodwinked into attending a "dry" lecture, flowed like balm over the wounds opened by the "religious issue." The stirring address by the Catholic priest won many a grieved and offended voter back again to the "dry" ranks—to the great dismay of Alderman McCarty who, when it at length dawned upon him that he had been tricked into attendance upon a "dry" lecture, rose noisily from his seat and scurried angrily out of the crowded hall.

"A master stroke!" exclaimed Loring, grasping Miss

Hazard's hand at the close of the lecture. "But," his face darkening as he glanced in the direction of Smith, "it will cost *that* fellow dear!"

"How *do* you suppose he happened to do it, Doctor?" cried the exultant young woman. "Was he deceived, too?"

The doctor knew, but he did not reply.

CHAPTER 30

THE mayor's presence on the platform at the "dry" lecture had not been fortuitous, Denman insistently explained, but quite voluntary. And he always tapped his forehead with his finger when he told it. And soon Mulligan, McCarty, and Moller were tapping their heads likewise, and voicing similar grave doubts on the mayor's condition.

"He ain't niver bin th' same since th' accidint," murmured McCarty, in doleful tones. "I've knowed it f'r a long time, but I hated to say it. Th' poor divvil!"

"Everything seems to indicate it, I'm sorry to admit," agreed the sympathetic Denman, shaking his head sorrowfully.

"Why," chimed in Moller, "no fellow in his right mind would do the fool things Gus has done of late! Have you heard him 'round talking with everybody, 'wet' or 'dry,' about the country needing statesmen, and how Filbert should have a business administration? He's all busted out with reform!"

"And before the accident he was always reticent, even sullen," resumed Denman. "But now he has begun to cultivate people. And he even talks in favor of woman suffrage! Why, a few weeks ago the women had no more bitter opponent than Gus! And look what he's doing to the 'wet' cause! Boys, before he gets any worse we've got to make him rescind his order to clean up the red-light district! I could stand for everything else, but that means too many votes, I tell you! I'm going to see him again to-day, and I'll report to you later."

Shortly thereafter the lawyer summoned Dr. Voss. And when their heads were together he found occasion to suggest that if the mayor were ever brought before a lunacy commission the result would cause a split among the doctors of Filbert.

"I know they are most of them 'dry' now, Voss," he explained. "But a squabble over the mayor doubtless would drive some of them into our ranks. See what the religious controversy did for us. The ministers went crazy!"

And yet it was not wholly a matter of securing additional votes by stirring up a controversy among the doctors of Filbert, Denman knew, but, rather, that the clouding of the main issue by such irrelevant internescine squabbles tended to keep the people's thought occupied with extraneous matters until election day should come around, when they would vote in accord with their present convictions. And those, the lawyer knew, were now overwhelmingly "wet."

And Denman was in a hurry, a dreadful hurry, to get it all over with. He was in a desperate hurry to utterly discredit Loring, who, he was convinced, was the instigator of the suit just filed against Schwartz *et al* for an accounting in the Vaughn affair. A factional fight between the Filbert Academy of Medicine and the County Medical Association, of which Dr. Loring was chairman, would further rend Filbert, obscure the local option issue, and leave the thought of the voters just where it stood at that moment. Then let the Vaughn case be opened, if Loring still had the stomach for it! Denman would be ready to devote himself to it without reserve.

"Voss," observed the shrewd lawyer, pursuing the matter further, "there are more Germans in the Academy of Medicine than in the County Medical Association, are there not?"

"*Himmel,* yes!" was the reply.

"Well, has it ever occurred to you, Voss, that the County Medical Association discriminates against Germans? And that its membership is made up almost entirely of 'drys'?"

No, Voss had never thought of that. But, now that his attention was called to the matter—

"Do you know, Voss, that the County Medical Association is taunting us with having an insane mayor?"

"Gott, no! *Himmel!* then let them prove it!" exploded the excitable doctor.

It was easily done. Almost at a word the rival medical factions flew madly each at the other's throat. Loring, sensing the issue, tried desperately to keep out of it, but his unwise associates forced him in. And, despite his pleadings, his ringing protests, certain "dry" members of the County Medical Association demanded that the mayor be brought before a lunacy commission, as a direct challenge to the garrulous Voss, who, in turn, was but yielding to the constant prodding of Royal Denman.

Filbert again seethed at every point. Mysterious warnings and threats came to Miss Hazard, Loring, and Taft over the telephone. The oldest and best families of Filbert glared at one another and muttered ominous words. In many families husband and wife quarreled violently over the various issues, political, religious, medical, and otherwise; and in others an unstable equilibrium was maintained only by agreement never to mention these topics in the home. More than one suit for divorce was filed as a result of the husband's insistence on the shaping of his consort's political views.

Despite threats and calumniation, Dr. Loring bravely stood his ground. "There is little, if any, place for alcohol now in medicine," he insisted, in the face of the stormy opposition by the "wet" physicians. And then he published in the *Tribunal* the statement which he, together with physicians from both Europe and America, had signed:

"Our most exact laboratory researches, both pathological and clinical, have proved conclusively that alcohol is a poison and that its use as a beverage is both degenerative and destructive to the tissues and organisms of the human body. In therapeutics it should be used with the same care and restrictions as any other poisonous drug."

The fact that many German physicians had signed this same statement began to have weight with the Teutonic population of Filbert. Loring saw it, and continued the bombardment.

"Alcohol is a protoplasmic poison. Its effects upon the reproduction of the human species is deadly: where it does not succeed in preventing reproduction, it blights the offspring. Alcohol is the

loathsome excretion of living organisms. It is a toxin, and obeys the law governing toxins, namely, that the toxin of one form of life is a poison to every other form of life of a higher order. The ferment germs are single-cell germs, the lowest form of known life. Consequently their toxin, alcohol, is a poison to all other forms of life."

Royal Denman, again using the *Item* as a medium of expression, sarcastically called attention to the fact that alcohol was not the issue before the people of Filbert, but the saloon.

Loring accepted the challenge. "The effects of alcohol," he said, speaking from the platform, "are very peculiar—but are *wholly mental!* It inhibits all the higher mental processes, but sets free the older, more primitive and purely animal proclivities. It acts as a mental depressant; and this becomes outwardly externalized in diminished bodily strength, lassitude, and lack of voluntary effort. It acts as a strong depressant of all the higher sentiments, of modesty, reserve, foresight, and prudence; it inhibits voluntary attention, logical association, and abstract reasoning. But, while inhibiting and depressing all that is best in the mental or spiritual nature of man, it, on the other hand, liberates the older, basic impulses, and causes the externalization of recklessness, quarrelsomeness, immodesty, coarseness, and criminal tendencies. It excites superficial emotion and garrulity, laughter and song, maudlin sentimentality and artificial sympathy. The paralysis of the higher mental nature is manifested in paralysis of the brain; this paralysis externalizes in paralysis of all true mental activity. Again I ask: Shall an institution whose business it is to produce paralysis be allowed to exist in this twentieth century?"

And then he went on to show that the normal human body makes no demand for alcohol—that is, that thought does not require it for the body—and that no living thing, be it animal or vegetable, imbibes it, excepting human beings who have created, in thought, or are in process of creating in thought, an artificial craving for it. "The whole phenomenon," he insisted, "lies in the *mental realm.* And there, doubtless, lies the *real* cure for the alcoholic cancer of civilization."

Denman was alert to his opportunity. Immediately he

set forth, through the *Item*, the futility of argument with one who, he alleged, while professing the tenets of "Mental Science," "Christian Science," or "The Immanual Movement," gains his livelihood through the practice of their irreconcilable antithesis, *materia medica*.

It was a telling blow. With the linking of Loring's name with these modern religious and therapeutic movements, the doctor's influence on the conservative, phlegmatic foreign population of Filbert was instantly nullified.

Miss Hazard in alarm flew to Loring's support. "It is a campaign of education!" she cried. "There is but one issue: Have the majority of the people the right to declare that the saloon shall be debarred from the territory in which they live? That right, we maintain, cannot be legally questioned. It is for us to show them that the evil character of the saloon is such that they should, for their own and their children's sakes, exercise that right. Nothing in America so interferes with the rights of men, women, and children as does the saloon. Therefore our own personal liberty, which is but the public welfare, demands that we suppress this pernicious evil in our midst. The Liquor Trust, through the saloons, controls elections and creates a degenerate vote, afflicting us with its own debased and unmoral agents as public officials. The Liquor Trust increases our cost of living, and then has the effrontery to burden us with heavier taxes to maintain the penal and medical institutions in which to care for its broken and worthless product! Why, the liquor men readily agree that scarlet fever, cholera, diphtheria, should be isolated, and the conditions that cause them be stamped ruthlessly out; they quietly submit to compulsory vaccination. But the saloon is a far, far more virulent scourge than any of these diseases; and yet they insist on their sacred 'property rights' against the common rights of human beings!"

But she could not stem the tide. A delegation of prominent "drys" called upon Dr. Loring and suggested that he retire from further active participation in the campaign.

"Then you business men take the leadership!" cried Loring. "The golden opportunity to settle the national

question as to what to do with alcohol by educating the workingman now confronts the big business interests of the country! You, Crossman, are liable for the conduct of your employes. If your workmen go to the saloons at noon for their lunch, they return to you less keen, less efficient, and far more liable to accidents, for which you must pay. You, Claver—"

"Humph!" grunted that gentleman. "I have a score of my own to settle. During the strike at my plant last summer I requested the saloonkeepers to refuse liquor to my men. Did they heed my request? Not much! But now they are pussyfooting around my office and begging me to support them in the local option campaign, the scoundrels! They demand that I permit them to exploit my workmen and make havoc of my business for their own profits, but if I raise a finger to protect myself they are upon me like ravening wolves!"

"But," Gale interposed, "it isn't so much the saloonkeepers themselves that we are fighting as it is the peanut politicians in the employ of the Liquor Trust—fellows like Denman, who are playing politics for holders of 'wet' moneybags. Those are the fellows who are blocking the moral sentiment of the nation!"

"Speaking of Denman," said Claver, "have you heard about his latest trick? He's banded the liquor dealers of Filbert together in a demand upon the merchants for a one per cent rebate on all purchases of merchandise. The revenue thus collected goes to fight the anti-saloon forces. This thing has been going on here for three weeks, and only just leaked out. I tell you, there's scarcely a business man in the country who has nerve enough to stand up against a threat of boycott, whether it comes from a religious denomination or a gang of dive-keepers! It's appalling what moral cowards we are!"

"But, what about the mayor? How do you explain his recent conduct?" asked Crossman.

"Insane," replied Claver. "He comes up before the lunacy commission soon. Filbert is certainly in the most peculiar, mixed-up situation a town ever got into! I don't understand it."

"Gentlemen," said Loring, gravely, "stand by the mayor. He has changed front, and is in the right. Don't let this get out yet; it would mean his death. But stand by him. I know whereof I speak."

* * * * * *

In the midst of it all, Royal Denman sat at his desk and exulted. And as he sat thus, shortly before election day, Tom Mulligan put his head in at the door.

"Come in, old red-thatch!" the lawyer called, with unwonted joviality.

"Th' mayor," whispered the clerk, as he shambled into a chair, "will he be tried f'r bein' daffy?"

"I'm afraid so, Tom," Denman replied. "Too bad, isn't it?"

"An' I could av told ye long since that he were off, only I knowed ye wouldn't believe me. But I've come to ax ye if they'd be callin' av me to th' stand to testify, do ye think?"

"Most likely, Tom. You have been very closely associated with him, you know."

"An' would ye mind puttin' me wise as to what I'd best keep mum on?"

"Oh, tell everything, Tom," laughed Denman. "I'll bet you've seen strange things, eh?"

" 'Tis so, Misther Denman. Whist! I mind th' day he an' Doc Lorin' had their scrap—only I thought th' doc loony then f'r callin' him Smith. But whin I see th' scar on th' mayor's arm—an' 'twas a bad one, that long—"

"Scar? On the mayor's arm?" Denman leaned forward and knit his brows. "Seems to me I've heard about that before. Tell me, Tom," looking up into the clerk's red eyes, "what about that scar?"

An hour passed, and Mulligan took his ponderous departure. Denman rose and paced the floor, thinking deeply. Then he turned to his chair and drew from his desk a memorandum book. "What about that scar?" he kept repeating. "Burns told me something—"

Suddenly he started to his feet. "They were going to the cemetery!" he exclaimed aloud. "My God! why didn't I guess it before!"

Swiftly the odd-shaped pieces of the great puzzle slipped

into place, and the completed story unfolded before him. With a cry of triumph he seized his hat and started for the home of Greta Schwartz.

CHAPTER 31

"MEN alone cannot solve the tremendous problems confronting us to-day," said Miss Hazard to Dr. Loring, as they sat alone in the office of the Civic League. "Nor can the women render their full measure of coöperation unless they are thoroughly organized. If this republic is to live, it must be new born. That is a threadbare platitude, I know; but most truths are. I tell you again, the burden of political responsibility is too great for the men. They have not proved equal to it.

"But," she continued, "nothing but hearty coöperation of the sexes, under systematic organization, will suffice—and that is going to be demonstrated on election day. But, as with the men, the gravest dangers with which we women have to contend now are apathy, smug content, indifference, and repugnance toward politics because of its corruption.

"And yet I find that there are but two classes of women whom we have to fear: those of the underworld, and the rich members of our social aristocracy. Those two extremes are exceedingly dangerous to the cause of equal suffrage, and to any sort of reform."

The doctor shook his head. "I can't understand it," he gently lamented. "But," rousing, "tell me—now that I am out of it all—where have you been to-day?"

She laughed aloud. "In Plainfield," she said. "The 'wets' took a 'personally conducted' party of Filbert business men down there to show them the 'wretched' conditions prevailing in a 'dry' town. You know, some sixty-five store rooms were left vacant when Plainfield went 'dry.' Well, fifty of them are now occupied by legitimate businesses, and the other fifteen, I discovered by a visit to the Recorder's office, are owned by the brewery interests, and cannot be bought or rented, although I learned that good offers had been

made for them. You see, the brewery people are keeping those fifteen stores vacant in order to deceive the people."

Again the doctor shook his head. "What next?" he exclaimed.

"Well," she went on, with animation, "after a careful inspection of those fifteen vacant store rooms, which the liquor interests will not permit to be rented or sold, we were taken to the public square, around the court house, where Mr. Denman very dolefully pointed out that there were no farmers, as in the good old days of the saloons. But while he was talking I made an examination and discovered that there were no farmers' teams there for the simple reason that the hitching posts that once surrounded the square had all been removed! These things I shall set forth in the *Tribunal* to-morrow evening, together with some facts about the 'wets' of Plainfield placing 'For Sale' signs upon their own houses and stores and then photographing them, to hoodwink the people into believing that it is due to a 'dry' town."

"They will stop at nothing!" exclaimed Loring.

"Nothing!" reiterated Miss Hazard. "And their latest trick was unearthed to-day. They have been going about quietly among the poorer, uneducated people here and asking the women if they intended to vote 'dry.' If they received an affirmative reply, they then instructed the women to place an X in the space opposite the word 'NO' on their ballots. Of course that would be a vote for the saloons. We are going out to-morrow to counteract that; but I presume many of the women will be left confused and uncertain just what to do."

"Denman's evil genius never sleeps," said the doctor, with a hopeless shake of his head. "They have the best of us now, and I don't see how it is possible to defeat them."

"The women, Doctor," Miss Hazard quickly returned. "I fear you underestimate our work."

"I do not, I assure you," the doctor made haste to reply. "And I know your work is quite unique, in that you have reduced political campaigning to a science."

"Why not, Doctor?" she asked. "Let me tell you what

I have deduced. A political campaign properly consists of two major phases: First, publicity; Second, the election itself: registering the voters' opinions at the polls. In the case of the women, the second phase is the more important. We find that about sixty out of every hundred women are against the saloon. And so it is of prime importance to get them to register this opinion at the polls. This accomplished, the result reduces to a mathematical proposition.

"The success of the election depends on thorough, systematic organization. We have a precinct captain and two block workers, a man to work among the male voters in his block, and a woman for the female voters, as you know. Our polling lists are very complete and accurate, and we are holding daily 'cottage meetings' and working on the doubtful voters. Mr. Howlett is handling our publicity department very creditably, I think. Our appointed 'helpers' have been wonderfully loyal. We have made hundreds of calls, held innumerable meetings and distributed tons of literature.

"Now on election day we shall have a special organization in each precinct, consisting of the precinct captain, a committee of five women for work at headquarters, and a committee of block workers to call on qualified voters and get them out to the polls. In each polling place we shall have a male challenger and a notary public before whom votes may be sworn in. A house will be selected near each polling place to serve as headquarters for the women on election day, and from which automobiles can be handled. At these various precinct headquarters we shall have a telephone girl and a house committee to report back to general headquarters everything of importance. There will be an automobile committee to provide autos for the voters."

The doctor nodded and smiled. "Everything seems to be arranged for," he said. "But, unfortunately, there is no possibility of anticipating Denman's maneuvers."

She shrugged her shoulders. Then she leaned over toward the doctor and said quickly: "The mayor is going to checkmate him. And I believe it is for the purpose of telling us how that he has asked permission to meet with us here to-night—"

A crash in the corridor brought them both to their feet. Loring rushed to the door and threw it open. In the hall without, two men were locked in each other's arms in deadly embrace. As they writhed from the shadows into the light, Loring recognized Smith and former policeman Burns. A broken office stool lay in the center of the floor.

Before the doctor could rush in to separate the struggling men, Smith broke from his opponent and sprang back. Burns hurled himself madly toward the mayor, but dropped like a log under a crushing blow. He struggled to his feet, but Smith was upon him like a tiger, and the former officer sank again under the rapid fusillade. Then Smith seized him by the collar, dragged him to the stairs, and shoved him headlong down. Never, thought Loring, had Smith seemed more like August Schmidt than at that moment.

"The cur—was standing on—this stool!" panted Smith. "Looking over your transom!" He shook himself together and tried to arrange his torn collar and tie. "I watched him. He came out of that room—"

The doctor's face went white. Without speaking, he hurried into the room which Smith had indicated and switched on the lights. Smith and Miss Hazard followed. A half dozen wires hung from various points in the wall next to the room occupied by the Civic League and led to a window, through which they disappeared into the blackness without.

"Dictograph!" exclaimed Loring, holding the wires in his hand. Then he drew his wondering companions hastily back to the Civic League office.

"There!" he cried, gazing about at the walls where the plastering had apparently broken and fallen away in spots. "Easy, aren't we? And now, unless these instruments have just been installed, Denman and his gang of pirates know our every secret!"

Miss Hazard sank into a chair and stared in consternation from Loring to Smith. The latter quickly read her thought.

"I am one of the gang," he quietly said. "But I have been kept in ignorance of this—"

Loring checked him with a whispered "Hush!" Then,

pointing to the broken spots in the wall: "Those instruments are still working! Come!"

They quickly left the office and descended to the street. There was no sign of Burns.

"Come to my house," said Miss Hazard. "We can talk there."

The town clock was striking twelve. They did not know that Moller and McCarty followed them up the street and watched them enter the Hazard home together.

* * * * * *

At daybreak, McCarty, quivering with excitement, stood pounding at the door of Denman's apartment. "Th' trumpet av victory's a-tootin'!" he called. "Come out an' listen to th' music! Doc Lorin' an' th' mayor's just come fr'm Miss Hazard's house, where they spint th' night!"

Denman hurried into his clothes to meet the rare opportunity.

"Moller's followin' th' mayor!" McCarty went eagerly on. "I come right here to report! Burns ain't beat up much, but he's drunk an' threatenin'! Things sure is movin', eh?"

Denman needed not the reminder. With the ministers at loggerheads, the doctors quarreling, the German vote solidly in the "wet" column, he was quite certain that things were moving. All Filbert reflected his ceaseless and cunning activity. The situation lay well in his grasp and now—

At eight o'clock he was hurrying down the steps of the Schwartz residence. A call from Miss Greta checked him.

"Remember," she said, coming up and laying a hand upon his arm, "you are to get rid of Caroline Hazard. When you are through with her you shall have my answer."

"And—it will be—?"

She smiled graciously. "I think you can guess," she returned, in a low tone.

He turned and continued on his way in triumph.

At ten o'clock the banks opened, and the mayor's check for a thousand dollars, drawn in favor of Belle Glover, was entered. Denman frowned when, receiving the information over the telephone, he realized that this suit had been settled out of court; but the frown melted into a smile as the avail-

ability of this bit of news for campaign purposes began to impress him. Then he carefully blotted and folded the papers on which he had been writing, and betook himself to the office of the *Item*.

At twelve, noon, Roger Taft seized Loring's hand, as the latter entered the lawyer's office, and bent over it, with tears starting from his red, sleepless eyes.

"I am breaking under the strain," he choked. "I passed Denman on the street this morning, and—the leer on his face—it was diabolical! Loring, he knows—"

"He probably knows all, Roger," the doctor replied, in a solemn voice. "I think we should be prepared. I—I saw him Sunday in the cemetery. He was peering into my vault. I came upon him suddenly."

"God!" gasped Taft. "And what did he say?"

"Oh, he was excessively cordial. But he made no mention of the vault."

Taft sank into his chair. "Tell me, Loring," he pleaded, "what you really think became of Schmidt's body."

The doctor sat down beside his suffering friend. "I haven't the slightest idea," he said. "Stolen, probably. But that Denman had anything to do with it, I cannot say. But we must not waste time in idle speculation. Denman intends to send Smith to an insane asylum—"

"But what is he going to do to us?"

"Play with us, as a cat tortures a mouse. But, come, we still have work to do. Miss Hazard and Smith and I went over the whole situation last night. We had to talk somewhat at cross purposes, for I didn't think it wise to reveal Smith's identity to her. But, under the guise of an attempt to clear up the issue in the minds of the voters, and undo in part Denman's malicious work, we spent the entire night in conference. Brace up, Roger!" he again admonished the sinking man, as he took his hand. "We are men, with work calling for men's strength. My affairs are all in shape, and I am now calmly awaiting developments. Like the philosopher, my only sentiment regarding death is one of curiosity. We are in the whirlwind, and where we shall be dropped, God alone knows!"

The hours sped on. At five o'clock that afternoon Miss Hazard was summoned to the telephone. A friend had called to offer her sympathy and to express indignation at the vile attack which that evening's *Item* made on her character.

Miss Hazard dropped the receiver and hurried to the door for the newspaper. As she glanced at the glaring headlines and then feverishly devoured the article following, her face first flushed, then became deathly pale. When she concluded the reading, the paper slipped from her fingers, and she buried her head in her hands and burst into tears. The low, scurrilous insinuations, citing her dining alone with "Clack" Harris, her oft-observed and reprehensible intimacy with certain hitherto respected persons, and her recent unbelievable attempt to win over the opposition by luring the mayor to her home the preceding night, fell upon the utterly unsuspecting woman like a meteor from a cloudless sky and crushed her to the earth.

Loring read the article, and, with an oath, dropped the paper and started for Denman's office. Smith cursed aloud, and, springing from his table in the Bulwer House, set out rapidly for the same destination. But Royal Denman was not to be found. Some one reported having seen him board the afternoon train for Chicago. General Diggin, muttering sentiments unprintable, drew out his rusted army pistol from beneath the pile of dust-laden, yellow papers on his decrepit desk and carefully wiped it off. Then he stalked grimly up Main Street to Miss Hazard's home and placed himself and the obsolete weapon at her service. From hundreds of Filbert's homes went up a cry of outraged sentiment; from hundreds of others rose shouts of derision and malicious joy.

The events of the stirring day drew rapidly to a climax. Taft and Loring came together in the doctor's office that night for another whispered conference, which lasted far into the morning. Smith kept to his rooms, alone with his problems. In the heavy darkness, just before dawn, he rose from his labors and went out.

Alone with his clouded thought, he felt more keenly than ever his isolation. As he trod the deserted streets the

void in his soul echoed their loneliness. He longed for companionship. Even a homeless dog—

A shot rang out on the still night air. Smith clasped his right side and whirled about. A door was thrown suddenly open, and by the light that streamed out he caught sight of a stubby form dodging behind a tree.

Then the cold stars and the low-hung moon went out, and he sank gently to the ground.

CHAPTER 32

GRAY fog, dank and thick, sank slowly down upon Filbert's streets, like long, quivering funeral plumes. The willows and poplars drooped and wept, and the low wind moaned through their stark branches. Nature mourned anew for the ignorance that since time began has pilloried her sons upon material lust and greed of the things that endure but an hour.

In the office of Royal Denman the brutish henchmen of that crass egoism called "personal liberty" assembled thoughtfully about the long mahogany table and glumly awaited the return of their chief, who had been summoned from Chicago by telegraph. In the Civic League headquarters little groups gathered and talked in low tones of the sordid events of the hour. And in a dimly lighted room of the poor little cottage at the rear of the Holsman lot, Charles Smith dreamily opened his eyes and looked up into the face of Molly Vaughn.

Slowly, as he gazed, perception dawned, and the mists rolled back from his mental vision. He essayed feebly to rise; but a sharp twinge in his side drove the blood from his cheeks, and he sank down again. She placed her finger upon her lips and shook her head, then tenderly smoothed his pillow.

He smiled and lay back. A grateful sense of peace stole upon him. He felt like one who, after a battle well fought, sinks into deep slumber. He dully watched her moving about the dimly lighted room, and vaguely speculated on his

environment and her presence there. And then his tired thought dwelt for a moment on the election, which was now so close. But he cared not. He was at last at peace. And he was drifting, drifting—

* * * * * *

Royal Denman hurried into his office and threw down his valise.

"Who did it?" he demanded, facing the cold stares of his associates. And when no response came from them, he impatiently repeated the question.

Then McCarty voiced the thought of his companions. "'Tis you that should know, me frind."

Denman turned savagely upon him. "What do you mean?" he snarled. "Do you think I did it?"

"Sit down, Den," put in Shelby. "Now tell us how you'd explain it."

"Why," said Denman, taking a chair, "it's as clear as day. Burns shot him, the fool!"

"Quite likely," assented McCarty. "But who put 'im up to it is what we'd like f'r to know."

"You see," Shelby continued, "the shooting is going to turn public sentiment in his favor, unless we act quickly—"

"Well," interrupted Denman, "we'll make out that he was shot by the 'drys'! Haven't you started that report yet?"

Shelby smiled grimly. "We've been too busy supporting your attempt to defame Miss Hazard in last night's *Item*," he said. "And we've about concluded that you overreached."

"Overreached!" ejaculated Denman. "Why—"

"Oh, 'tain't that we love th' colleen," McCarty felt impelled to explain, "but our own good horse-since tells us she's daycint! Whist! want she brung up a good Dimmicrat? An' ivirybody kin see that your mud has slopped over on us what's innercint! I tell yez, as I told her wanst, kape personalities out av th' campaign! You've brung in ivirythin' but th' rale issue, which is th' economic u-till-i-tee av th' saloons! An' f'r that we're goin' to git walloped, I'm thinkin'!"

Denman disregarded McCarty's remarks and turned to Shelby. "Where is he now?" he asked, his voice quavering.

"In Molly Vaughn's house. He was shot right in front of her door."

"Eh? Why—er—good Lord! can't you see he was shot by her? And you know why, don't you? But—have any of you seen him?"

"No," Shelby answered. "Loring kept us out."

"Loring? Well—why, you poor blockheads! you sit here sniveling, when you have all this new campaign material? Look here—"

McCarty broke in with an exclamation of disgust. "More stuff like what ye put in th' *Item* last night! Hivins! Av all th' dommed, sinceliss rot an' lyin' dope f'r a man av intelligince, y'r article about Miss Hazard heads th' list!"

"Hold your babbling tongue, McCarty!" cried the harassed Denman. "If I were to publish a few things about you they'd ride you out of Filbert on a rail!"

"Aw, they would, eh? They would?" shouted the irate McCarty, starting up. "Then I'd carry you in me lap, I would, ye blackguard!"

"Keep quiet, Bill!" cried Shelby, seizing the alderman by the shoulder. Then, to Denman: "You've got us in bad, Den, and there's no gainsaying it! And it isn't going to help any to start things about Gus and Molly Vaughn. Loring says they found an anonymous letter in Gus's pocket, threatening him for enforcing the Sunday-closing ordinance."

"They wrote it themselves!" burst from the white and shaking Denman.

But Shelby shook his head. " 'Twon't do, 'twon't do," he deprecated. "You'll have to cook up something different—"

"And, by heaven! I've got something different," shouted the lawyer. "I've got Loring and Taft right in my fist—!"

"Then," said Shelby, leaning eagerly forward, "suppose you take us into your confidence."

"Bah!" muttered McCarty, rising and starting for the door. "More av y'r wise dope!" Then, his voice gradually rising with the expression of his passionate indignation: "I'm through wid yez—through wid th' whole dommed

bunch! I've served yez well—I've licked y'r boots—I've run y'r errands and done y'r dirty work—an' if anybody's goat was to be got, 'twas always mine! But I'm a gintleman, an' I'm too tinder av me repu-ta-shun to be seen in such a comp'ny av idjuts! Go 'long to hell if ye wish, but I'll be excused!"

"And I'm with him!" exclaimed Lawver. "We had this election won until yesterday—"

"We've got it won now!" Denman shouted. "The fact that Burns got drunk and made an ass of himself doesn't affect my plans in the least! Why, I know things that would make your hair stand on end—but it isn't time to spring them! Putting Gus out of the way for the present works right into my hands! But you hot-heads have got to wait. If you weren't such fools you'd know that all I've got or expect to have is at stake in this election! And do you think I am going to blow it? Not I!"

He drew a card from his pocket and threw it down upon the table.

"There," he cried, "is the man who will win this election for us!"

Shelby took up the card and read aloud:

"Mr. Charles Smith. Folsom, Ohio."

* * * * * *

On Sunday morning Filbert's church bells sent forth their deep-toned appeal to the faithful to assemble for the final sermons against the evils of the liquor traffic. There would be no regular services that night, but, instead, a joint meeting of all denominations at the Baptist church. Royal Denman smiled grimly as he listened to the bells. They were ringing the prelude to the drama which he had staged. And he was now deciding whether it would be most effective if enacted in the church, or in the hall during the "dry" lecture which was to follow the great mass meeting. He at length determined on the church. And as he made the final decision, the door opened and Shelby entered.

Denman rose to greet his caller. "What's the news from Gus?" he asked.

"Well," said Shelby, seating himself and taking a cigar from the glass jar on the table, "he's out again."

Denman straightened up with a sudden, involuntary movement. "Out! How do you know?"

"Saw him on the street a little while ago, going toward Molly Vaughn's house. Couldn't have been hurt much, I guess."

Denman sat down and thought hard for a few moments. This would necessitate a change in his plans. And yet—

He shrugged his shoulders. He had intended to search the mayor's rooms that afternoon for Schmidt's will, but now that would have to be postponed. Still, he could do it to-morrow. And the thought brought a malicious smile to his white face.

"Why, Loring said Gus wasn't badly injured," he resumed, as if in continuation of Shelby's remark. "Just a nasty cut on the side. Anything been seen of Burns since?"

"Not a thing. He cleared out in a hurry."

"McCarty got over being mad?"

Shelby laughed. "Bill's worrying to-day about the prospective re-opening of the Vaughn affair. He was mixed up in that deal, you know. I guess he'll stick with us a while longer." He leaned back and laughed heartily at the alderman's expense.

Denman bent forward and laid a hand on Shelby's knee. "Look here," he said, "aren't you fellows ready to admit that I have run this campaign just about right?"

Shelby seized the hand and squeezed it. "You're a genius, Den!" he exclaimed. "We certainly have to hand it to you!"

Denman settled back, and a smile of satisfaction spread slowly over his chalky features. "And did I handle Miss Hazard in the proper manner, or not?" he asked.

"Absolutely right, Den! You've put the quietus on her for good!"

* * * * * *

Taft and Loring sat alone in the doctor's private office. By the flickering gas jet they were studying a series of documentary papers on the laboratory bench before them.

"You see, Roger," the doctor was saying, "if Smith hadn't come to Filbert this affair never would have been re-opened.

But because of the stir-up he has made, all these things have come to light. As I was saying, Gale now learns that Schmidt was related to the Vaughns. That accounts for many things, doesn't it?"

Taft raised his head and drew a deep sigh. "I can't keep my mind on it," he said, sadly. "I think I'd better go home."

Loring's face again clouded. Slowly he gathered up the papers and placed them in his pocket. "We will wait until after the election," he gently replied.

"And what is going to happen then?" groaned Taft.

"Whether we win or lose, Roger, Smith is going to leave Filbert. He told me so last night. And then the sword that has hung over us so long will be removed."

Taft sat sunk in dolorous meditation. Presently he roused up. "How long before Smith can leave?" he asked.

"A week—ten days. It is only a flesh wound."

Taft rose and took up his hat. "Miss Hazard is crushed—"

"It was a damnable attack! But all hell fights on the side of the saloons! The man—"

He was interrupted by the telephone bell. "Oh, Miss Hazard," he said, answering the call. "Yes, we were just speaking of you. You are not down and out? No, of course you're not! You're a trump! What's that? The mayor? No! Yes, yes! Well—I'll go right up there!"

He turned from the instrument, with a puzzled expression on his face. "Miss Hazard says the mayor walked up past her house a few minutes ago! It will be the death of him!"

* * * * * *

Rarely does feeling run as high as it had in Filbert during this local option campaign. But here there were elements of an unusual character that complicated the situation and increased the tension. And this tension had reached the point of rupture when the great throng assembled in the auditorium of the Baptist church that Sunday evening in demonstration of an outraged people's protest. Ministers of all the local Protestant denominations sat on the platform, and spoke, prayed, or read from the Scriptures. Loring and

Taft sat with them. And to the astonishment of many, Miss Hazard mounted the platform and took the chair which Dr. Loring placed for her.

Presently the sound of distant singing penetrated the room, growing ever louder, until at length the words of the "dry" slogan could be distinguished:

"Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Sound the words in triumph, fling them to the sky!
Filbert's going dry, Filbert's going dry,
Liquor's doom has sounded,
Filbert's g-o-i-n-g dry!"

Swinging down the street came a long procession, block after block of men, women, and children, headed by the Civic League. On they came, a triumphant throng, singing the campaign slogan with an impressment, a fervor born of righteous conviction, that seemed to roll everything before it, until the long line reached the church and began to sweep in. Hard-headed business men looked upon the procession, and turned away with eyes blurred with tears. The liquor sympathizers who stood on the curbs, ready to jeer, found no incentive as they stared at that marching host.

"Miss Hazard did it!" some one said. And a wild cheer went up, a cheer that froze the blood of the liquor forces and turned their cheeks white with fear.

And following them came—*the mayor himself!*

Straight behind them he strode, alone, looking neither to right nor to left. Was he insane? The gaping onlookers, when they saw him, said that he had sprung from his bed stark, staring mad! And they made way for him, as for a spirit from the nether world.

On he went, up through the crowded aisle to the pulpit. Dr. Loring rose and extended a hand to help him mount the platform. And then, with his arms stretched out over the great Bible, the mayor turned and stood looking out upon the breathless audience.

"My friends," he began, slowly, and in a voice scarcely audible, "I have come back from the dead."

At the words, several of the audience rose in their intense excitement. Cries of "Down!" came from all parts of the house. The mayor stood silent for a moment. Then:

"A light—a great light—burst upon me, and in it I saw the one—"

He stopped, for there was a commotion at the door. Presently Denman, Shelby, Lawver, and Moller crowded into the room. Denman turned to speak to an officer who accompanied him, and the latter proceeded at once down the aisle and mounted the platform. Loring and the ministers sprang up as he approached; Taft collapsed in his chair. The officer went directly to the mayor and laid a hand upon his shoulder. Then he turned and said, in a loud voice:

"I have a warrant for the arrest of Dr. Loring, Roger Taft, and Charles Smith for the murder of August Schmidt, mayor of Filbert!"

Silence crashed down upon the assemblage. Through it the mayor's voice was heard in reply:

"He is not dead, my friend. *I* am August Schmidt."

Denman had wormed his way up to the pulpit. "That is a lie!" he shouted. "You are Charles Smith, of Folsom, Ohio, hired by Roger Taft and Dr. Loring to remove the leader of the liquor forces and impersonate him!"

"You are mistaken," said Loring, confronting the excited lawyer. "Charles Smith lies wounded at the home of Molly Vaughn, shot down by one of your hirelings. This gentleman is August Schmidt, his twin brother, and the mayor of Filbert!"

CHAPTER 33

THE *Tribunal* and *Budget* were evening newspapers, bitterly jealous of each other, acrimonious and recriminatory, but in the intense excitement of the hour they turned from watering their animosities and entered into a temporary truce for the purpose of "scooping" their mutual rival, the unmentionable *Item*, by issuing a joint morning "Extra" with a lurid explanation of the startling *denoûment* of the preceding night. General Diggin declared that in the Army, even in the regiment which he had had the honor to command, cases of "doubles" had not been infrequent, and that the fortuitous arrival in Filbert of the mayor's twin

brother on the night that August Schmidt suffered his disabling accident would find an explanation that would undoubtedly appear ridiculously simple when these two gentlemen should see fit to make it public.

But the spiteful little *Item* was not to be outdone by its hated contemporaries. It issued a screaming ten o'clock edition on Monday morning, in which it denounced the whole affair as a despicable ruse perpetrated by the "drys," who, on the eve of election, had sprung this bold venture, for which they had been long preparing. "Surely," it concluded, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread!"

The overwrought minds of Filbert's citizenry were plunged deeper into confusion. For August Schmidt—if it were really he—had again disappeared, and as completely as if the earth had swallowed him. All that could be said in explanation was that the great concourse which poured from the church out into the streets, increasing in volume and clamor at every corner, had engulfed him, and he had not emerged.

Sleep fled the leaders of the opposing forces that memorable night. Loring stationed a guard of "drys" at the Vaughn home to hold the surging mob at bay, and then hastened to Miss Hazard's house with Taft for a quick shaping of plans to meet the altered situation.

"I haven't much to tell," he said, hurriedly, when pressed for an explanation. "Molly Vaughn and her sister seem to have known about this for weeks. When I was informed yesterday that the mayor had been seen on the streets, I went at once to the Vaughn home. But Smith was there, in bed. I might have known that he couldn't get up. Then the wildest suggestions came to me, but before I had time to act, the door bell rang—and there stood August Schmidt!"

"Yes, yes! And then—?"

"Molly Vaughn was right behind me—but I didn't know that she was expecting him! He came in on the afternoon train—"

"From where?"

"Heaven only knows! He didn't mention his 'accident,' nor did he say how he escaped from my vault in the ceme-

tery. He merely said that he had returned to Filbert because he had learned that his twin brother was here—"

"But how did he learn that?"

Loring shook his head. "I don't know," he answered, in deepest perplexity.

"And does Smith know of his return?" asked Taft, in a trembling voice.

"No. Schmidt was in a great hurry to get to the church."

"But—Molly Vaughn—what does she say?" cried Miss Hazard, utterly absorbed by the great mystery.

"Nothing," the doctor replied. "And yet I am positive it all came about through her. But I'm going back now to see Smith, and I'll keep in close touch with you. And, Miss Hazard, don't relax your vigilance for one moment! The 'wets' are making capital of this, we may be sure!"

* * * * * *

And thus election day dawned upon such a state of excitement as lethargic Filbert had never thought to experience in its ultra-conservative civic career.

"I have learned nothing further in regard to August Schmidt," Loring told Miss Hazard, as he walked down to the Civic League headquarters with her that morning. "But this I do know: the 'wets' are desperate! Look out!"

Miss Hazard recalled her thought from the mystery and concentrated it upon the business of the hour. "I can't think of anything we have left undone, Doctor," she said. "I went through every precinct again yesterday. The women are coming out, I *know!*"

"Be on your guard every moment," was the doctor's grave reply. "Denman still has tricks up his sleeve! I am going over to see Smith now."

Nor were the doctor's apprehensions baseless. When Miss Hazard arrived at the Civic League headquarters she found the "dry" workers in utter dismay.

"There's not an automobile to be had!" they cried in unison.

For a moment she stood aghast. And then the explanation came. Every public garage in the city was owned by a liquor sympathizer, and every automobile known to be

owned by a "dry" and stored in these garages had been completely dismantled the night before. Nor was that all. Garages privately owned had been entered, and the automobiles so tampered with as to be rendered unfit for use.

And then did Miss Caroline Hazard rise to the new emergency. With Dr. Loring and a loyal police officer to see that "Central" did her duty, she went to the telephone exchange and sent out calls to "dry" sympathizers in all parts of the county. Within a half hour a hundred automobiles, teams, and single rigs were rushing toward Filbert. And by ten o'clock they were in commission and carrying scores of women voters to the polls.

The polling places had been shrewdly chosen by the liquor forces in control, and were for the most part located in ill-smelling livery stables, cheap hotels, near saloons, and in miserable shacks in disreputable parts of the city, where the women would be obliged to pass dives, poolrooms, and low resorts to get to them. Nothing daunted, however, Miss Hazard flanked the approaches to these places with reputable citizens, both men and women, who, despite insults, jeers, and frequent threats, bravely held their positions throughout the trying day.

With studied care the liquor forces had contrived to hamper and annoy the women voters in every way. The pencils in the polling booths were either broken and useless, or missing altogether. On every hand were effusively sympathetic "wets" of the "Clack" Harris and Willie Pond type, eager to proffer assistance calculated to further confuse the women and either prevent their voting, or cause them to mistakenly vote "wet." Electioneering was openly done by the liquor supporters. Frauds were frequent and flagrant. "Wet" money flowed in torrents. The city and outlying districts had been scoured by the "wets" for negroes, and these, well supplied with money and bad whiskey, were herded to the polls in flocks and voted repeatedly. For, as Royal Denman facetiously observed, "you can't recognize a negro as a repeater because of his color, and we defy you to prove that there have been frauds."

But, despite his ruthless tactics, by three o'clock Den-

man was visibly nervous. Miss Hazard's precinct captains, grim and determined, were bringing the women in crowds. And so he gave the order to gain time by incessant challenging of "dry" votes, and to provoke squabbling and petty quarrels, with the view of intimidating the women and disgusting them with their newly acquired but dubious privilege of voting.

At four-thirty Denman knew that his cause was waning. He had just returned from making the rounds of the polling places. He had been everywhere—and everywhere he had run into Miss Hazard. And everywhere he had been forced to recognize the results of her systematic organization of the women of Filbert. He had been informed by his spies that Miss Hazard, in making this last visit to the precincts, had often found her captains sitting with hands folded—in some places they were having tea—and her inquiries were met with the cheerful response: "Oh, we are all through! We have accounted for every 'dry' or doubtful voter in our precinct. Here's our list, completely checked." And Miss Hazard would nod and smile as she hastily scanned the list. Denman could have choked her with good grace! But time was now his most precious asset. With but a half hour left, he crowded the polls with Greek laborers and so blocked the various entrances that belated "dry" voters could not get near them. Feeling ran higher and higher, until it touched the culm of madness. Dr. Loring, as coroner and public official, issued a proclamation from the court house steps that carried a threat of appeal to the governor of the state for protection from the riotous toughs whom the desperate "wets" were crowding into the polling places.

At four-forty-five, with new alarm clutching his heart, Denman issued his final command, and the "wets" began to vote vacant lots, empty houses, street corners, lamp posts, everything and anything in a frenzied effort to swell their grossly adulterated vote; but when the town clock bellowed out the hour of five and the polls closed, Denman knew by a glance at the polling lists and registration books that Miss Hazard and her loyal, indefatigable captains and co-workers had brought out nearly every "dry" vote in the town.

To what further depths of malicious mischief he might have plunged during the counting of the votes, we may not say, for scarcely had the polls closed when he discovered that other considerations demanded his attention. These were embodied in the startling form of a summons to the mayor's office, issued by August Schmidt. And the summons was served by none other than former policeman Burns, who had been detailed to conduct the bewildered lawyer thither!

In the mayor's office with August Schmidt sat Loring, Taft, Gale, and Schwartz. Denman's face went ashen when he saw them, and he hung at the door. But Burns shoved him roughly forward, and he sank, wilting, into the chair which Loring drew out for him.

"Mr. Burns tells us," Taft began, gravely, "that he found Mayor Schmidt locked in a cell in the jail, where he had been confined since last evening. It may interest you to learn that, inasmuch as the sheriff could not be located, Dr. Loring, as coroner, compelled the jailor to release him. And now may we ask what disposal you intended to make of Mr. Schmidt?"

Denman's scant, inefficient figure all but disappeared through his chair. Taft waited a few moments, then resumed:

"Mr. Burns admits shooting Mr. Smith, and has returned to receive his punishment. But he states that he confused your instructions and assaulted Smith instead of Miss Hazard, as you—"

"It's a lie!" gasped Denman, shaking with fear.

Burns sprang toward the lawyer, and would have laid violent hands upon him had not Loring and Gale restrained him. "There's a lot more I could tell!" panted the struggling Burns. "You promised Miss Greta you'd do up Miss Hazard if she'd marry you—!"

Schwartz was on his feet. *"Gott in Himmel!"*

"There, gentlemen, sit down and let us proceed," cried Taft. "Mr. Burns confused your instructions, Mr. Denman, and the confusion was due to liquor. Few assassinations, you know, Mr. Denman, can be accomplished without the

stimulus of alcohol. But we will pass that, inasmuch as Mr. Smith, very fortunately, is not seriously wounded."

He took up some papers from the table and handed them to Denman. They were the documents which he and Loring had been studying on Sunday afternoon when the report of the mayor's presence on the street came over the telephone.

"The Vaughn case, Mr. Denman," continued Taft, in a cold, judicial tone, "has at last been thoroughly sifted, the final and concluding evidence being furnished by Mr. Schmidt since his return. Now, to save time, let me say that, representing the Misses Louise and Madeline Vaughn, sole descendants of Pierre Vaughn, I am authorized to compromise this suit against Schwartz *et al*, and settle out of court for one hundred thousand dollars."

A hollow groan broke from Schwartz, and he sank back in his chair in utter desolation.

Denman roused up. A ray of hope filtered through his thick mental gloom. He braced himself with a mighty effort. August Schmidt, were it really he, would not dare—

The mayor suddenly raised his head. His eyes caught and held Denman's.

For an instant a fierce gleam shot from them. Denman recoiled from it as from a heavy blow. Then the mayor's mouth opened, and the voice that issued fell upon Denman's bursting ears like the howling of a winter's wind among forgotten graves. He could have screamed with terror and mental agony.

"I have come back from the dead. When I lay in the Loring vault old Pierre Vaughn came to me. He held me, and his hands were of ice. He held me until I saw myself as I really was—and then he let me go, and I burst from the vault and rushed out, mad with remorse, to find the girl I had ruined—his daughter, Louise. I have found her—thank God!" He buried his head in his hands, and for a moment heavy sobs shook him.

Then he roused up, with a look in his eyes that shot terror into the quivering soul of Royal Denman.

"And God send me back to the tomb if I do not this day

restore to her every dollar that you helped me take from her!"

"Let me briefly outline the case, Mr. Schmidt," interrupted Taft, apprehensive lest the man be engulfed by his emotion. "The facts, Mr. Denman, are these: August Schmidt was related to the Vaughns, their families having intermarried in Europe years ago. Pierre Vaughn came to America with money, and settled in Filbert, where Mr. Schwartz later induced him to go into the brewing business with him. It was in this brewery that August Schmidt secured employment when he drifted into Filbert.

"Unfortunately, Pierre Vaughn was not a good business man. And so, as is so common, Mr. Schwartz, with the assistance of yourself, Mr. Denman, squeezed Vaughn out, and acquired, not only all the liquor property of the latter, but his Filbert real estate. A new company was then formed, letting in McCarty, Lawver, Moller, and others, including yourself and those of the 'gang' who had your approval, and the liquor properties were transferred to August Schmidt under mortgage, the mortgages being held by Mr. Schwartz, who owned most of the stock in the new company. Mr. Schmidt tells us that for your services in this miserable transaction you received an exorbitant cash fee, in addition to stock.

"There, please do not interrupt," as Denman seemed struggling to rise. "Now, to resume: Before this miserable deal was put through, August Schmidt, playing both ends of the string, had sought to marry Louise Vaughn, and thereby secure the property to himself. To accomplish this, he systematically set about to ruin her—and succeeded. But then Schwartz put over the new deal, and Schmidt discovered that it was not necessary to marry Louise Vaughn, and that his interests now lay in a different direction, namely, Miss Greta Schwartz.

"I will hurry over the wretched affair. The Vaughns were reduced to poverty; Pierre Vaughn went mad and died in an asylum; the two Vaughn brothers became victims of whiskey; Louise Vaughn bore August Schmidt's son and would have become a suicide, had not her sister Madeline,

better known as 'Molly,' nobly taken the disgrace upon herself. Molly induced Louise to leave Filbert, and then devoted herself, through years of sorrow and misery, to bringing up August Schmidt's little son, Karl—"

A groan from the mayor checked Taft. The latter threw a look of pity at the suffering man, then hurried on.

"A 'dry' victory will not affect the real estate which you and Schwartz filched from the Vaughns, Mr. Denman. And it is this real estate that we now intend that you and he shall restore—amounting, because of increased value, to about one hundred thousand dollars. Oh, yes, I know that Mr. Gale was administrator of the Vaughn estate. But he found nothing to administer. The 'gang' had it all! And poor Molly Vaughn, alone and bearing the awful disgrace of her sister's ruin, was helpless against such men as you and Schwartz—

"But something at last intervened—call it Fate, if you will—and Mr. Charles Smith, twin brother of our mayor, came to stir up the affair from the very bottom. And now, Mr. Denman, Mr. Schwartz has agreed to our terms—"

"Ach, mein Gott!" burst from the suffering Teuton.

Taft turned to him. "We are sorry, Mr. Schwartz," he said. "But, if you prefer, you can stand trial—"

"Himmel, no!" shouted the unhappy man. "But if der tam town goes 'dry' I keeps der money vat Denman giff me for der mortgages—und he stole it from der state liquor organization—"

The shouts of newsboys crying their "Extras!" in the streets without broke in upon them.

"Filbert 'dry' by three hundred! Supervisor Lawver snowed under! Great victory won by the women!"

With a roar of rage Schwartz sprang up and rushed over to Denman. The lawyer uttered a choking cry of abject terror and crumpled up, half fainting, with his claw-like fingers fluttering feebly upon the chair arms.

"Dot money vat you giff me fer der mortgages stays vere it iss!" bellowed Schwartz, thrusting his bewhiskered face into Denman's. "It vill keep me out of der prison und der poorhouse! But fer you—" seizing Denman's nose and giv-

ing it a violent twist "—you kin take your chances mit der Vaughn suit und der state liquor organization alone! I'm finished mit you—you *Dachshund!*"

CHAPTER 34

JUNE'S roses in Filbert's gardens breathed their sweet perfume into an atmosphere untainted by alcohol. Among them strolled Molly Vaughn and Charles Smith, hand in hand.

"I have just come from the hospital," she was saying, "and—"

He interrupted her. "My dear girl," he said, "Tim Jordan owes his life to you. And now what are you going to do with that life?"

"Oh," she laughed, "fashion it into something beautiful—"

"As you have mine?" he interposed. "And August's?"

"No, Charles," she protested. "It was not I who did it. How many times must I remind you of that?"

"Oh, yes, I understand. You were but the 'channel,' and it was your 'Principle' that did the work—and all that! But, just the same—"

She reached up and put her hand over his mouth. "Tell me," she said, turning the conversation from herself, "about August."

"The process of renovation is going on rapidly," he replied, "and August is ruling with a rod of iron. He seems to know how. I fear," he added, with a sigh, "I made a poor substitute. But I was new at the game."

She looked up into his face and smiled happily. "You made a wonderful substitute," she said.

"The 'gang,'" he went on, "is badly split, and Denman is out with them all, especially with Lawver, who lays his defeat to him. By the way, see what that imbecile has in to-night's *Item.*" He produced a copy of the newspaper and read aloud:

NOTICE

Admitting that I did not run as fast on election day as Royal Denman did last week when General Diggin chased him down the

alley, I still maintain I made as good a showing as Bill McCarty will next spring when the ladies show him how popular he is.

JAMES LAWVER.

She laughed as she listened. And then her face became grave again. "Strange, isn't it?" she said, "how utterly foolish evil always is. This local option campaign has shown, as nearly all reform movements do, that the forces of evil are not clever, not wise, but densely ignorant, clumsy, and blundering. They always resort to foolish things, like this work of Supervisor Lawver's. And they win by their clumsy bluffing, their crass assumptions of power that they don't possess. Charles, if the good men and women of this country should rise in the consciousness of their real strength, they would drive evil into the sea over night! Now tell me about Mr. Denman."

"Denman," he said, "is trying desperately to keep out of prison. He's owned, body and soul, by the state liquor organization now, and what they will do with him remains to be seen. They have a hold on him that he will probably never be able to break. But he's trying to put on a bold front. Says he's waiting for the Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of woman's suffrage in this state. But, strangest of all, I understand he admitted yesterday that the liquor arguments were mostly buncombe, and that, as he expressed it, the 'wet' cause never did have a leg to stand on!"

"Why, no, Charles," she gently corrected, "that is not strange. Mr. Denman probably is beginning to see what I have known so long, that 'evil is always a suicide.' The liquor traffic, Charles, has killed itself."

"Yes," he agreed, laughing, "like Denman, it overreached."

"Evil always overreaches and proves itself nothing," she replied. "That was shown when you determined to impersonate the mayor in order to make profit out of the awful business."

"What blunders I made!" he mused, aloud.

"Indeed you did!" she agreed, with a hearty laugh. "How you used to wonder how August Schmidt conducted

himself in my presence, when the fact was that he never entered my house, never had anything to do with me at all. And as for impersonating him, why, I knew the first day I saw you that you were not the mayor!"

"You should have told me," he said, reprovingly.

"I—I wanted to wait," she gently returned. "I knew that good would come of it, and that I could save you. After I had guessed that you were not August Schmidt, I told Dr. Loring. And then he told me who you were—said that you came from Folsom, Ohio. And then it occurred to me that possibly August might have had a twin brother—you looked so much like him—and so I asked Dr. Loring to write to Folsom and make inquiries about you. And then, shortly afterward, I received that strange letter from your brother August, written from Folsom, saying that he had awakened there, in that awful storm that destroyed half the town—"

Smith shuddered. "The strangest case I ever heard about!" he said, in a tone of awe. "I don't wonder August will not talk about it. Loring calls it 'suspended animation.' In the excitement that Sunday night when I arrived here Loring thought August was dead. And August himself remembers nothing that happened from the time he fell in Taft's office until he awoke in the storm in Folsom, and found people calling him Charles Smith. But he says—" His voice fell to a whisper. "He says that in the dream-interval your father came to him. There must have been a struggle in Loring's vault. The movement of his body against the loosely placed seal caused it to fall out. The cold air probably revived him. But how he wormed himself out of the sepulcher, no one can say. He found the door of the vault unlocked—Loring forgot it, you know. And then, in utter mental darkness, he wandered off, to awake in Folsom—shocked back into himself by the terrific storm. Now tell me, what took him there? Chance?"

"Nothing ever really *happens*, dear," she answered, softly. "If you had not been his brother it is unlikely that he would have wandered into Folsom. He knew he had a brother somewhere, you know."

"Yes. You see, according to what Loring dug up, our family name was Schmidt, and we boys, twin brothers, were born in New York. I was named Karl. Then our parents quarreled and separated, father returning to Germany with August, and mother keeping me with her. Gradually mother came to be known by the name of Smith—easier to pronounce, I suppose—and I grew up as Charles Smith. Mother died when I was very young; and I never learned anything about our family."

"But August knew," she said. "I have heard him say that he probably had a brother somewhere in this country."

"Yes, father, just before passing away, told him that his twin brother Karl was in America—but he didn't know where. But when August came back to this country he became so engrossed in money-making that he never took the time to hunt me up. With the making of money came the hardening of soul—"

"Ah, yes," she gently interrupted. "But that hard soul broke when he fell against the radiator in Mr. Taft's office, and he emerged from the tomb a new man. And then he came back to Louise and to his little son, Karl. Evil is always a suicide, dear, *always!*"

"But," he protested, "do we have to wait until it kills itself? Where would Filbert be now if such fighters as Loring and Caroline Hazard and—"

"Charles, you won a great victory here, a splendid one! But it is like clamping a lid on a spouting volcano. You have not quenched the fires smoldering beneath. While you have removed some of the manifestations of evil, you have not destroyed the forces that were doing the manifesting. Closing the saloons in Filbert does *not* change the human mind—does it? Though the saloons have gone, the evil in human nature remains, and will continue to manifest itself in various ways until destroyed. We shall have to learn, some day, to wipe out evil itself, and not merely its manifestations. And that 'wiping out' process, you will learn, is entirely mental."

For some moments they strolled in silence. Then he again pressed her hand and looked down into her eager face.

"Madeline," he said, tenderly, "August and I are both new men—and it all came about through you. Will you teach me your philosophy?—after we are married, I mean, for I am too happy to think of applying myself to such a dry subject now!"

She laughed up into his glowing face. "My philosophy, dear, is my religion. And that is Love—spelled with a capital L."

A shout greeted them, and little Karl came running through the flowers.

"Supper's ready!" he panted, as Smith swung him high in the air. "And papa's come, Uncle Charles!"

They turned and wended their way through the gathering twilight to the little house of Molly Vaughn. At the door awaiting them stood August Schmidt and his wife, Louise.

And then they went in to supper with the mayor of Filbert.

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